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## Military hub won't wear out welcome

BY BRYAN PAINTER  2 Comments  
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"Let me help." We hear and see evidence of that all the time in Oklahoma.

Hesitation is almost nonexistent when help is needed.

That helping spirit is what I noticed the first time I walked into the YMCA Military Welcome Center at Will Rogers World Airport. Two military personnel were sitting at computers, and another was over at the couch partaking of a complimentary cookie.

They were waiting, but while they waited, they had a few comforts of home to enjoy. Volunteers were all around, making sure they were comfortable.

I was reminded of that same helpful spirit recently when I was told of the new Military Center that is opening Saturday at Will Rogers.

This one will be bigger and offer more than its predecessor. The new center is in a building just outside the east side door by Baggage Claim 1.

But first, a little background. The YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City opened the Military Welcome Center on June 4, 2007. The center offers a restful and relaxing atmosphere for traveling military members from all branches, active or retired.

"Our operation of the Military Welcome Center continues a proud history of YMCAs serving the military dating back to the Civil War," said Dena Drabek, communications director for YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City.

The new center has 3,600 square feet as compared to 750 square feet in the old one.

Instead of one main seating area for 12 people and temporary seating for 22 people, there are a few seating areas for 29 people and temporary seating for 64 people.

Instead of one TV and two computers, the center has two TVs and six computers. Visitors can play video games and board games. The complimentary snacks remain, as do the paperback books.

Oh, and there now are two restrooms in the center.

All of this wouldn't have been possible without the partnership between YMCA and Will Rogers World Airport.

It also wouldn't have been possible without the commitment from those who serve in the Welcome Center and the ongoing support from individuals, groups, businesses and foundations.

And foundation is a good word, because the past has definitely set a foundation for the present and future.

## Through the years

The YMCA Military Welcome Center has served almost 90,000 military personal and their families since it opened in 2007.

Last year serves as a good example. The center recorded 31,729 visits in 2009. Clyde Tullos, the center's director, is a retired Army soldier who serves as the center's director and is the only paid employee.

The center operates primarily with the help of volunteers and community donations.

A group of 55 volunteers provided 10,000 hours of service at the Military Welcome Center in 2009.

"The caring volunteers strive to provide a homelike atmosphere for military travelers," Drabek said.

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