

## Military OneSource Podcast — MWR Perks: Free, Low-Cost Fun for Military Families

### **Episode transcript**

#### **Intro voice-over:**

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [militaryonesource.mil](http://militaryonesource.mil).

#### **Bruce Moody:**

Good morning. It's a beautiful day. Perfect day to talk about MWR. So, let's bring you into the podcast. Can you please introduce yourself?

#### **Natasha Das-Ford:**

Yes. Natasha Dass-Ford, Chief Librarian, Throckmorton Library.

#### **James Day:**

And I'm James Day, chief of Outdoor Recreation.

#### **Bruce Moody:**

We're going to talk about MWR, we're going to talk about recreation, all of the things that fall within your areas. So, military families, wherever they're stationed, overseas, stateside, whatever, they've got MWR in all of its offerings, and we're going to try to get through as many of that as possible. I'd like to start with the libraries because that's a combination of your on-installation library, but also the digital libraries. And there's programs to go along with that and we'll get to that in a moment. But just give us a sense of what your library program looks like to the average service member and family member.

#### **Natasha Das-Ford:**

Sure. So, we have our digital resources, a combination of about 102 resources, encompassing educational databases, recreational databases, crafts, car repair. So, we have a lot to offer digitally. But in the building as well, you can find those in print resources. And we have story times for parents, we have computers for military personnel to complete their trainings. We offer something for everyone. And the best part, it is all free.

#### **Bruce Moody:**

It's all free. And then how much of it is online? In other words, if either getting to the base is difficult because I'm home or maybe home is far from an installation, talk about what your online digital opportunities are.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Sure. Online digital opportunities, again, we offer databases, learning databases, educational databases, entertainment databases. You can read a book online or you can listen to an audiobook as well. And that is via Libby, our digital app. So, the easiest way to register for Libby is using your CAC card. Bring it into a library or reach out to a librarian via email. We will get all your information. You will have to have your barcode scanned off your CAC card. That becomes your library card to access our resources.

**Bruce Moody:**

And there's a lot of really interesting resources. For those who maybe don't want to read a Jane Austen novel, but want to know how to fix their car. I mean, there's everything, there's everything under the sun.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Yes, there is something for everyone. From zero to a million years old, we offer something for everyone.

**Bruce Moody:**

All right. We're going to get back to you and we're going to talk about the summer reading program, but let's talk about outdoor recreation and give us a sense of kind of the range of things that you offer.

**James Day:**

Okay. So, Outdoor Recreation encompasses quite a few different activities. We have our recreation area, which includes hiking and biking trails. We have frisbee golf courses. We have a lake that you can kayak and stand-up paddleboard on and swim at. We've got inflatable bouncies on the water that you can bounce around and jump in the water to cool off on a nice hot day. We have campgrounds that family members can come visit their soldiers here at post. We have parks, playgrounds; we have an ice rink here at our location. We have shooting ranges that you can shoot both rifle, pistol, shotgun range. And then we have an equipment checkout center. So, if you don't have the equipment and want to get out, we have plenty of items that we can rent to you for a day, weekend or even a week at a time.

**Bruce Moody:**

And frisbee golf and all of that sounds a lot of fun. It's also really tied to readiness. It's also really tied to making sure that people can blow off steam themselves, so they're ready to get back to work. It's also there, so that they know their families have opportunities for them. And when you have that combination of being able to take care of yourself, you're able to take care of your families, then you're better able to focus on the mission. So, what do you see when you're watching folks who are taking advantage of your programs?

**James Day:**

So, we do see a lot of different age varieties out at our parks, from toddlers all the way up to retirees utilizing our spaces out there. People who want to come out and just walk the trails and

bird watch. We have tons of wildlife at our recreation areas. And then those who want to be a little more active, we have the mountain bike trails, and they go from very basic level, very flat trails, to very hilly and complicated. So, you do get a variety of that adrenaline rush activities to those that are very peaceful and allows you to just decompress from your week.

**Bruce Moody:**

Talk a little bit more about the checkout gear that you have because maybe people don't want to spend or can't spend money on gear that they want. They have an activity in mind, but maybe the cost of the gear is stopping them from pursuing it.

**James Day:**

Right. So, we do offer very good quality mountain bikes at our location. We have a variety of boats, Jon boats, pontoon boats. You can jump in a kayak or a canoe, and we just have a variety of things that you can check out, get on the water. And if you need a party stuff, we do bouncy castles; we have barbecues, large and small barbecues, dunk tanks. And if you need party equipment, we got cotton candy makers, popcorn makers, snow cone machines. So, if you need to have that birthday party or some sort of activity, we can provide a lot of that material for you.

**Bruce Moody:**

I'm thinking that when I was growing up, I got cake. And now people are getting bouncy rooms and cotton candy machines and being able to do very much on the cheap, and that's really amazing. So, what sort of reactions are you seeing from service members, family members, kids, when they get a birthday party with the bouncy room, for example?

**James Day:**

Well, you see just the smiles on their faces, and you get to hear the stories when they return the equipment. Just how much of a good time they had, and just they're appreciative of us offering quality equipment at a very competitive price.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, absolutely. Let's talk more about the library.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Sure.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, I remember in the summertime, it was always a big effort for my parents to get me to read, and there were these read-a-thons and things that we have. So, you have something called the summer reading program. and it's not just here, it's actually globally. So, everyone in the military can participate in the summer reading program. So, talk about that and what it's all about.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Okay. Our summer reading program theme this year is "level up at your library." So, when I hear level up, I think about games, board games, puzzles, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, video

games. So, that is something we offer as well. We do have video games for a check-out. We have movies and CDs which are dwindling, because most people are streaming now. But these are the things we offer. So, for the summer reading program, it usually runs June and July, and we have variety of entertainers. We will have magicians; we have puppet shows; we have acrobats and jugglers and unicyclists. So, we try to combine entertainment with reading, encouraging fun, and therefore we are leveling up at our library.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now the summer reading program, again, I work back in DC, so I'm back in the Pentagon and the headquarters, and we get these reports of just how many minutes of reading were cataloged. Talk about these minutes that are cataloged each year. It's pretty amazing.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

So, we encourage reading during the summer to avoid the summer slide. When kids are out of school, they tend not to read. So, to encourage reading, we offer entertainment, like I said, but we also offer incentives. So, while reading, we encourage tracking of reading minutes to get the incentives. Last year at our library, we logged about 1,800,000 plus reading minutes. So, yes, we had many families participated, many children reading, excited families coming in on Wednesdays for our in-person programs, and they take the opportunity of Wednesdays to return items and checkout items for the next week. So, we have recurring events and recurring families and that's what we're looking for. Families coming back, keeping retention and validating why we are in the community.

**Bruce Moody:**

That's awesome. Let's talk about how people can become aware of what their base has to offer and what do they need to bring to their local MWR shop if they want to either go on a trip or check out snow cone maker or any of these fun things.

**James Day:**

Okay. So, in order to rent our equipment, you do need to be an ID card holder. So, you do have to have either an active duty or a DOD civilian ID card to utilize a lot of our activities and events if you're going to pay for it. But some of the things fortunately are free to the public. You don't even have to come out and show an ID. You can show up and walk the trails, play on the playgrounds at no cost, and we just continue to improve upon those things and provide newer and updated products every year to try to make sure that the soldiers are getting the high-quality recreational equipment that they deserve.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now as I would go from base to base during my career, each base had a set of offerings that were kind of unique to them because of where they were. So, what are the sort of things that are unique to this base?

**James Day:**

So, this base is our ice rink. There's only three ice rinks in the Army, and the Cleveland ice rink here is very unique. It's open 12 months a year, so it's not even a seasonal rink like the one in

Alaska is. We are very popular with figure skaters, the hockey community and then just general public skating. We offer programs 5 a.m. for the adult skates, and we can go all the way up to past 10 p.m. on the weekends for public skate. So, the ice time is definitely utilized a lot. And then also at that location, we have an outdoor inline rink. So, if you wanted to bring your roller blades and do some skating. And we have a skateboard park right on the backside and that's free to use. So you can bring your skateboard, your roller blades, your BMX bike, and it's just a very quality skateboard park on the backside of the ice rink.

**Bruce Moody:**

How about trips, vacations, involving flights and hotels and itineraries? Do you help out with those?

**James Day:**

These are travel services and that's over at our mini mall. So, we do have a qualified staff that that's their job is to get you guys, soldiers, to go to Disneyland or Universal Studios. They can plan the whole trip with you. They have ticket agents that can work through that process. Or if you just know what you want, you can go and buy discounted tickets through them, and that is a very highly attended destination for soldiers.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, question for the both of you. Is there something that you offer that people say, "I did not realize that this is something that you offer."

**James Day:**

So, for me, I hear that all the time. At our shotgun range, we have the largest skeet range in the state. And it's kind hidden back over off post. And then when people come over and they enjoy the skeet range. But we also have a paintball facility there, and you'll hear them say, "Oh, I've been here at base for two years and this is the first time I've heard of this place." So we like to see that people are getting out and experience what we have to offer.

**Bruce Moody:**

And as far as going into the library, what do you see when family members are bringing their kids into the library?

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Well, they're very excited to learn that we have story times, of course, for all age groups. Plus, we have a STEAM program, Lego programs. We will be offering a crochet, basics of crochet learning class. So we offer craft activities. The biggest draw in the library right now is our computer lab. We have 75 computers that are accessible to everyone. However, they're heavily utilized by our soldiers who need it for mental training, mental agility. Just like the gyms, they have physical agility. At the library, we have mental agility.

**Bruce Moody:**

That's fantastic. As we wrap it up, I just want to maybe invite you each to give kind of a pitch to maybe someone who's living off the installation, doesn't have a lot of interaction with what's

happening on base and needs to be encouraged to take advantage of what you have to offer. And I'll start with you.

**James Day:**

Okay. So, the process, even if you need to get on post, it's pretty simple. You go to our visitor center, you get checked in. Once you get approved, your driver's license becomes your pass and that can be up to six months. I just did that with my mom who's visiting, and it was a five-minute process and now she's able to get onto post and utilize the free parks and stuff that we can go to. And then just our different areas off post, like going to the shotgun range, you're off post, easy access, don't even have to go through a access control point. Same way with the recreational area. So those make it very easy to host. We have a conference center there at our recreational center and we have big birthday parties, graduation parties and being off post allows those family soldiers to bring in people when they don't even have to go through the visitor center. It just makes it so much easier for them to plan those activities and host those big events.

And then the setting is just gorgeous. You're out in the pine trees, you're overlooking a lake in your party. It's a gorgeous setting that the Army has provided for us to offer to the soldiers.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, it is gorgeous country here. And you will get the last word.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Okay. At the library, we have families who make connections. And that's the main thing, making connections. When they move there, they know that they can go to the library and connect with the library. We offer similar items. Just seeing in the building, we have a playground outside as well, so families take their young ones and go out to play. If they cannot check out a book, we offer free Wi-Fi within the library, so anyone can come read a book or connect on a computer, on a laptop with our Wi-Fi. We have something for everyone.

**Bruce Moody:**

And you both do. And we're going to put a bunch of links in the program notes, so people can take those first steps to take advantage of MWR and the library and all that you have to offer. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today.

**Natasha Das-Ford:**

Thank you. I appreciate being here.

**Bruce Moody:**

Thank you. I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always love to hear from you. If you have a question or a comment about today's episode, we have a link in the program notes. You can also use that link if you have an idea for a future episode. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we have a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody, thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.