

# WI National Guard: Serving those who serve: Service Member Support Division Part 4 - Badger Yellow Ribbon and other resources

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 6, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

When Wisconsin National Guard units are notified of an upcoming deployment, they immediately begin to train and prepare for the mission ahead. Similarly, the individual Guardsmen and their families ensure they have everything in order before the deployment begins.

The entire deployment cycle may be overwhelming for service members and their families, but Wisconsin's Badger Yellow Ribbon program works to make the process easier.

The Badger Yellow Ribbon program, a part of the Service Member Support Division, helps Wisconsin's deploying Service Members and their families by facilitating access to support services, information, education, and outreach opportunities.

"It is not only for the Soldiers, but their families too, helping the families of the deployed cope with their loved one being away," said Vicki Cushman Edgren, the director of the Badger Yellow Ribbon program. "It helps families and Soldiers to be able to have information about resources and referrals for help during the process of deployment. It connects families with other families during the deployment cycle."

Badger Yellow Ribbon events are hosted through various stages of the deployment cycle. Soldiers and families start at an event preparing for the upcoming mobilization. More than 20 agencies are onsite at these events to provide

information and discuss how to prepare and who to contact for any questions while the Soldier is deployed.

Families attend a reunion brief approximately 30 to 45 days before their loved one is scheduled to return to the United States. This event helps families ensure they are taking care of themselves, prepare for the return, and understand how to adjust. Inevitably, deployments have an impact on family dynamics and experiences. Families at the event learn more about how to understand their Soldiers through the experiences of a Soldier who has been through it before.

There are three phases to the program after Soldiers return home from deployment. Phase I and II help Soldiers and families understand the benefits they have earned, and how to regroup and refocus on their life and career following deployment respectively. Phase III is for Soldiers to complete a health reassessment following their deployment.

“While this program is mandated by law along with the content mandated by the Army and National Guard Bureau, we in Badger Yellow Ribbon work very diligently to makes this an enjoyable experience,” Cushman Edgren said.

She added that there are many things outside of their control, but the Badger Yellow Ribbon team makes as many tweaks as possible to ensure that Soldiers and their families have longer break times to talk to agencies on site and gather the information and resources they need.

The resources available are constantly changing making each event unique no matter how many times a Soldier and their family have attended.

“I was married to a service member for many years and lived the life of these families,” Cushman Edgren said. “I know the questions they have and years ago never knew there were resources available to myself and my children. Now my goal is to ensure that everyone I can knows what is out there or at the very least where to go to start finding help.”

One of the key resources available for National Guard Soldiers and their families throughout the deployment cycle is the Reserve Component Transition Assistance Advisor Program. The service goes beyond support at Badger Yellow Ribbon events.

The Reserve Component Transition Assistance Advisor serves as a resource referral

agent to connect Service Members, veterans and families to their veterans benefits, programs and services.

“We maintain a wealth of knowledge that the service member and families can tap to get them on their way to where they need to go, regardless of what the challenge is,” said Jeffrey Unger, Wisconsin’s reserve component transition assistance advisor.

Unger is a combat veteran who retired from the Air Force. He brings first-hand knowledge of the process that Wisconsin National Guard and Federal Reserve service members need to navigate their myriad of details and three main business channels of the Veterans Administration to his role.

“When I retired from active duty, I made a commitment to not let any dust settle on my smartly sewn stripes,” Unger said. “I have kept that promise and thoroughly enjoy remaining active and on the Service Member Support Division team, making a significant and positive difference.”

Another Service Member Support Division benefit available is employment services. The Wisconsin National Guard employment team utilizes government and non-government resources to provide employment assistance to Service Members and their families.

Employer support is essential for service members to focus on and complete their missions without added stress. Many service members choose to recognize the outstanding support their employers have provided by nominating them for a Freedom Award, the nation’s top honor for employers that support National Guard and reserve component employees. Even more present their employer with a Patriot Award through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program.

“We truly appreciate the support of all Wisconsin Employers for their tremendous support of all military reserve component members,” said Scott Legwold, a retired brigadier general and chairman of the Wisconsin ESGR. “We sincerely look forward to working with employers, service members and their families to ensure we have the strongest relationships possible to support reserve component military service moving forward.”

In 2021, three Wisconsin employers — the village of Pewaukee Police Department, Associated Bank and INNIO Waukesha Gas Engine — have received the 2021

Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award,

The Wisconsin National Guard has also teamed up with the Guard Employment Network (NGEN) to offer career readiness support and placement through a broad network of resources and services to find jobs, training and education opportunities.

While the Badger Yellow Ribbon program helps to introduce service members and their families to these programs, many resources are available even outside of the deployment cycle.

“There is an answer to every question and a solution to every problem,” Unger said. “All you need to do is ask.”