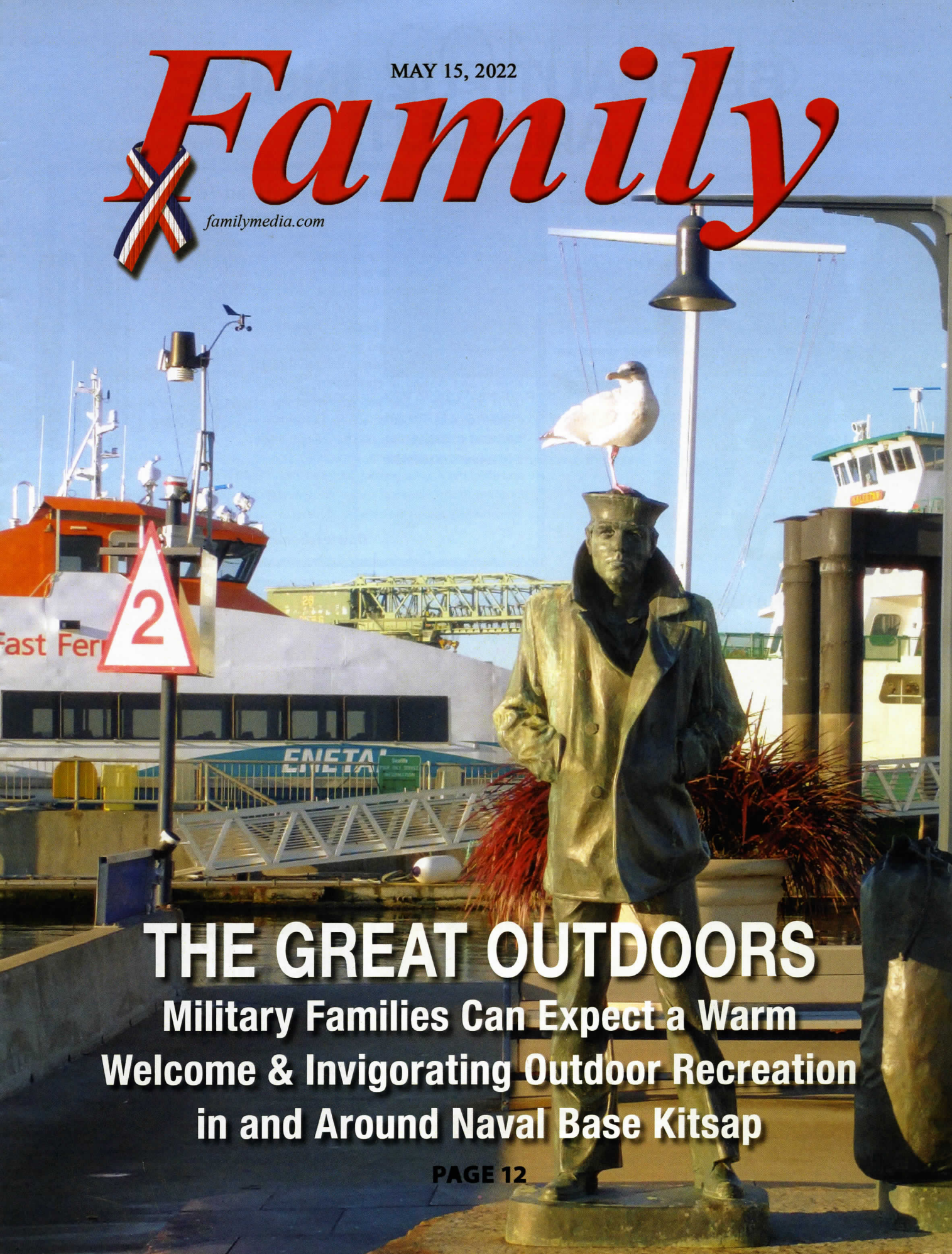


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THE GREAT OUTDOORS

**Military Families Can Expect a Warm
Welcome & Invigorating Outdoor Recreation
in and Around Naval Base Kitsap**

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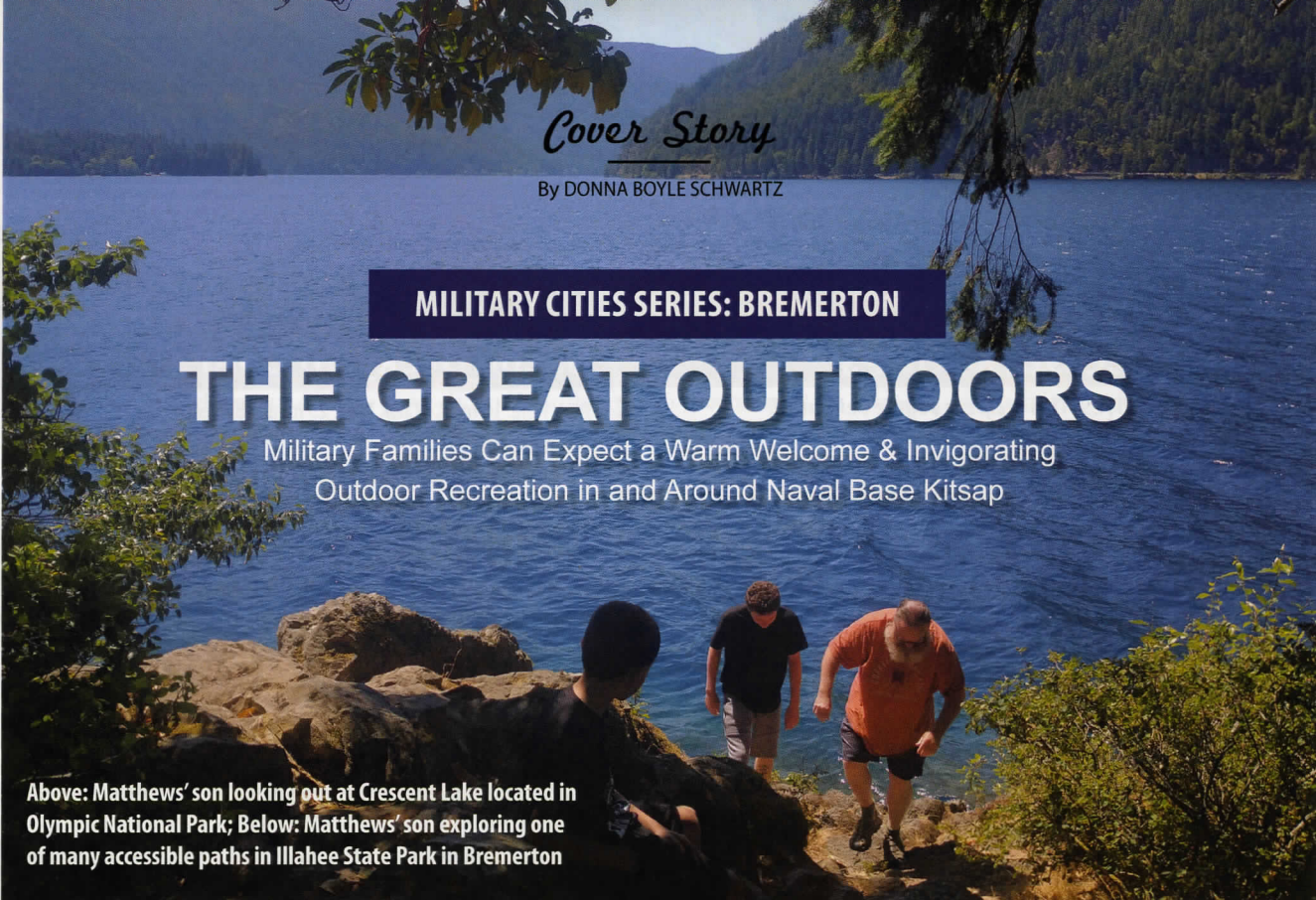
Cover Story

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ


MILITARY CITIES SERIES: BREMERTON

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Military Families Can Expect a Warm Welcome & Invigorating Outdoor Recreation in and Around Naval Base Kitsap



Above: Matthews' son looking out at Crescent Lake located in Olympic National Park; Below: Matthews' son exploring one of many accessible paths in Illahee State Park in Bremerton



Military families

relocating to Washington State's Kitsap Peninsula can look forward to joining a creative community that is rich in history and filled with a plethora of family-friendly outdoor adventures.

Naval Base Kitsap was created in 2004 through a merger of the former Naval Station Bremerton with Naval Submarine Base Bangor, and it is now the third largest Navy base in the U.S. The combined Bangor/Bremerton unit serves as the home base for the Navy's fleet throughout west Puget Sound, and it is one of the Navy's four nuclear shipyards, boasting the only West Coast dry dock capable of handling a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier.

The sprawling Naval Base Kitsap includes the city of Bremerton and several surrounding towns; all of which offer easy accessibility to the various Navy working locations. "It can be confusing when you're moving here because



**Above: The dock and Manette Bridge, connecting East and West Bremerton;
Right: The iconic Space Needle in downtown Seattle**

there are two parts to the base and they are in different towns!" relates military spouse Afton Matthews, whose husband is a 19-year Navy submariner. "There's the Bremerton portion of Naval Base Kitsap which is where the carriers dock and the shipyard is. Then there's the Bangor portion of Naval Base Kitsap which is in Silverdale. That's where the deploying subs are housed. If you haven't seen it before, it can make learning the area and finding resources difficult to grasp."

In spite of the initial challenge of finding her way around, Matthews has high praise for the area. "We moved here in April 2021 I'm never leaving!" she declares. "My husband is planning to retire at 21 years and we'll stay here. However, I've heard he's getting out before, so if he changes his mind we'll do our first geobach (geographic bachelor) so my son and I can stay."

The relocation has been a pleasant experience, according to Matthews. "We expected a cultural fit for us; it's been that and more," she enthuses, describing the overall vibe as "growing, outdoorsy, temperate, pro-small business and creative."

"We've taken up paddle boarding and we love walking to sleepy downtown Bremerton for coffee in the mornings or date nights in the evening," she adds. "There are great local businesses everywhere. With the ferry to Seattle being minutes from our house, we can be in Seattle for a concert or to meet friends from out of town quickly."

Housing availability can be a challenge for military families relocating to the area: Matthews and her husband have a 10-year-old son and live in off-base housing. "We have always lived off-base and found it's easier to put down roots in the community by doing so," she says, adding, "It is very difficult to find housing here, though, so for those moving be aware to start looking early and get ready to act fast if you find a rental or a listing you love."

"Begin searching for housing early, on- or off-base," she recommends. "Don't delay getting on the housing list and realize the basic allowance for housing (BAH) probably won't cover everything you're used to it covering if you're in town. We had to move my husband before we had permanent housing for

Discover Bremerton

From the City of Bremerton website:
<https://www.bremertonwa.gov/>

"A one-hour ferry ride - or thirty minute fast ferry ride - from downtown Seattle, Bremerton is truly a beautiful city where guests enjoy the downtown Harborside area. It includes Kitsap Conference Center, two hotels, fine dining, coffee shops, cafes and the Port of Bremerton Marina with 220 permanent slips and 100 for visiting boaters. We invite you to enjoy a stroll through the Arts District, Puget Sound Navy Museum, USS Turner Joy, Boardwalk, Harborside Fountain Park and PSNS Memorial Plaza all located near the ferry terminal. Take a short walk across the Manette Bridge for more cafes and shopping. A few blocks north of downtown is Evergreen Rotary Park featuring the 9/11 Memorial and accessible playground. Gold Mountain Golf Course includes two 18-hole championship courses and disc golf is available at NAD Park. Our diversity has rewarded Bremerton with a thriving artistic and cultural community. Bremerton has nine unique neighborhoods with new affordable housing, excellent schools, 35 parks and many recreation programs. It will be easy to see why people are experiencing Bremerton and what a great place it is to live, work and play."



my son and I; it was one of our more stressful and complicated PCS moves due to housing availability in our budget.”

However, Matthews says that there are a myriad of opportunities in the area for outdoor leisure that provide budget-friendly recreation. “Come with an open mind and know there is so much to explore outside that costs very little,” she points out. “The access to mountains, state parks, national parks, the city and the water is why people love it here. Even if you’re not outdoorsy, you will be amazed by the beauty and accessibility.

“Olympic National Park is close enough for a day trip and so is Seattle, which has everything a big city typically does,” she continues. “The Chihuly Bridge of Glass and Dorky’s Arcade in Tacoma are wonderful. We’re also a huge fan of Quarters Arcade in downtown Bremerton. Across the street from Quarters is Blue Sky Games and Hobbies: a nerd’s heaven. Tracyton movie theater is a locally owned theater with great ticket prices and options for dining while you watch.

“It’s easy to find hiking trails all over,” Matthews adds. “Poulsbo’s Norwegian downtown offers a wonderful family stroll. There are many wonderful and large parks, my favorite of which is Evergreen Park where you can launch a boat, play on the swings, attend the Farmer’s Market, get a sandwich at CJ’s General Store and gelato across the street.”

In terms of local restaurants, Matthews says they have some clear favorites: “We love Juanito’s Taqueria, Mehfil Indian, Spiro’s for pizza, Khao Soi Thai, and Scoops and Bites for ice cream.”

One downside of the area is the climate: although it does not rain as much in Bremerton as it does in other parts of Washington State, the area still experiences an average annual precipitation of more than 55 inches. “We do have short days in the winter and very long ones in the summer,” Matthews admits. “Though it hasn’t rained as much as I expected, it does rain more than many places. We get snow about once a year and very few homes have air conditioning. During snow, most things close. A room air conditioner has helped manage the hotter summer days.”



The view of the USS Turner Joy museum as seen from the Bremerton Docks

Because the Navy employs so many people, the area is particularly welcoming to military families. “With the size of the base and shipyard in relation to the general community, everyone seems tied to the Navy in a ‘seven-steps-of-Kevin-Bacon’ style and there is no dislike of military families,” Matthews notes, adding that there are a number of resources for families new to the area. “Military Spouses of Kitsap is the Facebook group for the area,” she explains. “There is a local COMPASS program. Fleet and Family is full of wonderful individuals happy to point you in the right direction for resources and information about the local area. There’s also the Navy Life PNW website for the area which will connect you to many resources: www.navylifepnw.com/.

“Kitsap Strong is working through many local organizations to take a trauma-informed approach to social services, which can have a positive impact on service members and families,” she adds. “Although they are not a formal support group, their work resonates in many areas of the community. Also, the School Liaison Officer (SLO) has a child mentorship program that is so valuable for the transition of kids. They always need volunteers to mentor, as well.”

In short, Matthews highly recommends the area, citing, “Mountains for hiking, parks for playing, water for serenity, and the city of Seattle at your doorstep, but not in your backyard,” and declaring, “It’s the best!” 🇺🇸