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Family

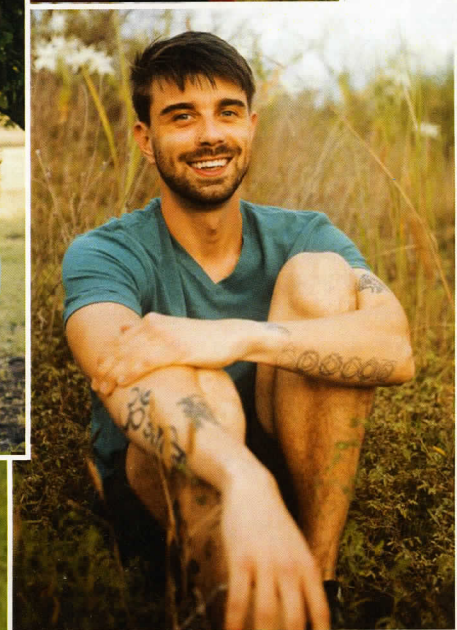
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FINDING SPACE IN 'THE GREAT PLACE'

Central Texas Communities
Eagerly Embrace Fort Hood
Soldiers & Families

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Cover Story

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MILITARY CITIES SERIES: FORT HOOD

Finding Space in ‘The Great Place’

Central Texas Communities Eagerly Embrace Fort Hood Soldiers & Families

The Lone Star State is known for its wide open spaces, which may be why the U.S. Army chose central Texas for the location of its new facility to test and train with World War II tank destroyers in 1942.

Since then, Fort Hood has grown to become the largest active-duty armored post in the U.S., employing more than 45,000 soldiers and some 8,900 civilian employees in an area covering more than 214,000 acres. Fort Hood is the only U.S. post capable of stationing and training two armored divisions simultaneously. The base is divided into three sections: the main cantonment, known as Main Post; West Fort Hood and North Fort Hood.

Nicknamed “The Great Place” for the area’s welcoming approach to soldiers and their families, Fort Hood is located halfway between the Texas cities of Austin and Waco, about 60 miles away from each. It is home to the III Corps, 1st Cavalry Division, 13th Sustainment Command, First Army Division West, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, and 1st Medical Brigade, among other units.

Families of military personnel stationed at Fort Hood, as well as recently separated veterans, agree that Fort Hood and the neighboring communities are extremely friendly to military families.

“Our family purchased a home in Harker Heights, just a 10-minute ride from the front gates of Fort Hood,” comments Army spouse Selena Conmackie. “We love our off-post neighborhood which has many military families that are active duty along with retired military families that decided to stay. Before PSC’ing here, I remember Fort Hood not being a choice we wanted but ended up being where the Army sent us. The stories we had heard from neighbors from our previous duty station weren’t as bad as they had mentioned. It’s overall been a great move for our family finding some lifelong friends, and building of businesses for after retirement from the military – friendly enough that my whole family piled into town to hang out for two weeks and reconnect.”

Joseph Moehrholt, another military spouse, agrees, noting that he and his husband, recently-separated veteran Aaron

Left: Selena Conmackie and her family; Below left: Army veteran Annette Whittenberger and family; Below right: Joseph Moehrholt



Moehrholt, purchased their Harker Heights home sight-unseen. "Harker Heights is very military-friendly; my neighborhood is primarily military," he comments. "I was excited to move to Texas. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, the geography of Texas brought joy to my heart.

"From the beginning, we decided to live off post," he continues. "We wanted to grow as a couple and buy homes together; Aaron always had an interest in real estate, which led us to create off-post housing opportunities for military couples through our properties."

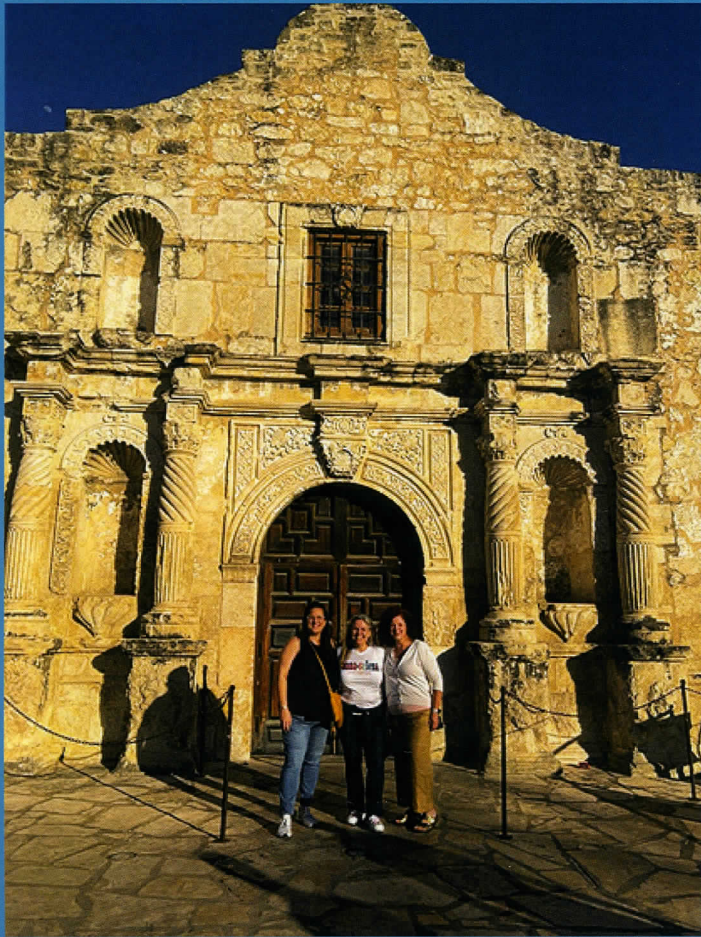
The Whittenbergers, a dual-military family, also chose to live off-base in Killeen. "I first was stationed at Fort Hood from 2004-2010 and came back in July 2021," explains retired Army combat veteran Annette Whittenberger. "We chose to live off post the first time because we were on a strict deadline where I was still stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, MO and my husband, who is an Army colonel, was set to deploy. He purchased our house so that the kids and I would have a place to live since he would have already deployed once we arrived. We expected to remain in Killeen, TX for the standard three years and never expected to stay for six."

The families agree that the area offers numerous recre-

ational opportunities. "The overall vibe is busy, friendly and family oriented," comments Whittenberger. "The Fort Hood area has grown tremendously within the past 15 years. It is a busy community with many features for both families and single soldiers.

"There are many new restaurants, and a newly developed park and recreation center in the Harker Heights and Killeen area," she continues. "The Harker Heights area was just nominated for a music-friendly community and offers movies at the park during the summer months. The Belton area has a lake with several amenities along with their popular restaurant called Dead Fish Grill. It overlooks the lake and has great food and a nice environment."

Moehrholt says the area is calm and friendly, with a lot of parks, Stillhouse Hollow Lake, and community events. "Harker Heights has plenty of food and small shops to enjoy, with family activities in the surrounding area in Killeen, Belton, and Temple. Stillhouse is my favorite place to go, but the Harker Heights Community Park is a great place to take the dogs and kids of friends. While they may seem small when you come from larger cities, there are plenty of farmers' markets in multiple cities to enjoy. Downtown Temple has a small and quaint community with kid and budget-friendly shops to enjoy."



Places to Go, Things to Do

From the Discover Central Texas website:

<https://discovercentraltexas.org/>

The town of Killeen, Texas would not have grown into the city it is today without the establishment of Camp Hood, a U.S. military reservation, in 1942. The base, now called Fort Hood, attracted thousands of families to the area as a way to meet the demands of World War II.

The website recommends the following activities in Killeen.

- **Dining:** Taiwan Dragon, Stillhouse Wine Room, Tyku Wine Bar and Lounge, and The Waffle Den.
- **Shopping:** Killeen Mall featuring shops American Eagle, Buckle, Dillard's, H&M, PacSun, Sephora, and more.
- **Outdoor Activities:** Golf at Stonetree Golf Club; hiking and biking at Heritage Oaks Hike & Bike Trail.
- **Arts & Entertainment:** Family fun at The Lions Club Aquatics Park, Great Escape of Central Texas, and Project Scuba. Adult fun at Axed Out Texas, Lunar Mini Golf, and Killeen Bowlerama.

The website also lists recommendations for other nearby communities adjacent to Fort Hood, including Harker Heights, Gatesville, Nolanville, Belton, Copperas Cove, and Morgan's Point Resort.

Conmackie agrees, noting, "We have loved the lakes around the Fort Hood area that range from free to very reasonable for taking the family for a nice picnic, hike, or just to sit and relax, along with on-post activities that are great and can be found on their MWR page. A local park in Harker Heights started doing movie nights at the park. Really dialing into social media pages of the towns in our area is a good way to see what to take advantage of without the stress of cost.

"We love that the area has enough to offer us without feeling like we have to drive hours to a bigger city," she adds. "There is a Target; coffee shops; and a variety of restaurants, from mom-and-pops to the typical chain restaurants. Our daughter loves going to a local roller skating rink or heading to any of the many movie theaters. We enjoy that we can take an hour drive to Austin for many big city activities or Waco for the Magnolia Silos, or the bigger drives to San Antonio to see Riverwalk and The Alamo."

Moehrholt also urges newcomers to check out the nearby cities: "Don't let distance be a factor to not exploring the area... Austin and Waco are the closest large cities, and it can feel like a long drive, but they are great day/weekend escapes."

As a yoga teacher, Moehrholt is working to bring more LGBTQIA+ activities to the area: "I have been working on the first study on LGBTQIA+ Yoga Therapy and its positive impact on our wellbeing, to support LGBTQIA+ active-duty military, veterans and spouses," he remarks. "As a queer person, there are not many queer military resources outside of the standard military on-post resources. I hope to continue to build queer resources that are accessible within our communities."

Admittedly, there are some downsides to Fort Hood, most notably the area's reputation for violence, including sex crimes, suicides, and homicides. One of the deadliest mass shootings at an Army post occurred in 2009 at the base, in which 13 people were killed and more than 30 others injured.

"Every place has its pros and cons," Whittenberger explains. "As with any other post, there will always be places to avoid – it is not terrible, just not places that you have to be around. Just be open-minded: I chose to come back to this area after being away for 15 years. We chose to purchase a house here and it has been kind to us. Take people's comments with a grain of salt. Some will always have something negative to say. Don't let that deter you from enjoying this place." 