



# Survivor's Link

COMMUNICATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



## Navy Gold Star Program Hosts Children's Virtual Art Show

By Rebekka Yeager, NAVBASE San Diego Gold Star Coordinator

In the face of a global pandemic, Navy Gold Star Program coordinators put their minds together to create a new type of awareness campaign in a completely new format. The goal of the campaign was to raise awareness of the Gold Star Program as a whole while bringing a sense of happiness, purpose and positivity to children in the military community during a time of great uncertainty for all of us. This led to the theme for our Virtual Children's Art Show: Create something that makes you happy.

Thirty-two children from around the globe responded with their positivity and love, representing all branches of the military community, including Gold Star Survivors. The children's parents submitted the artwork from April 15 to May 15, and voting was held May 18 to May 22. A Facebook album that was created for voting was shared more than 65 times through many military organizations, bringing a smile to the faces of more than 40,000 individuals!

More than 3,000 people took the time to personally vote on the submissions and share their words of encouragement. Luci, mother of one of the art show winners, said that the contest was a great source of happiness for both her and her daughter Kiara during her husband's current deployment. Kiara said she felt the outpouring of happiness and love from those who rallied around her, as did the other contestants.

The voting was separated into two age categories: 3 to 9 and 10 to 16. In the 3 to 9 age group, Carly W., 8, was chosen as the finalist and contest winner with 131 votes; Bryann, 9, was chosen as the first place runner-up with 92 votes; and Kali S., 8, was chosen as the second place runner-up with 88 votes. In the 10 to 16 age group, Kiara, 14, was chosen as the finalist and contest winner with 633 votes; Madison, 15, was the first place runner-up with 511 votes; and Alexis H., 13, was the second place runner-up with 264 votes.

*Thank you to all the children for spreading positivity and love. The art show was a true success!*



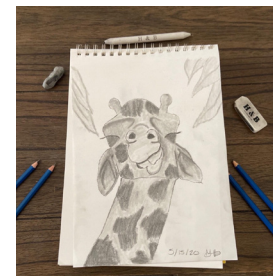
Winner  
Carly W., Age 8



Winner  
Kiara, Age 14



1st place runner-up  
Bryann, Age 9



1st place runner-up  
Madison, Age 15



2nd place runner-up  
Kali S., Age 8



2nd place runner-up  
Alexis H., Age 13



## A Survivor's Story

By Ashley Bugge, Gold Star Wife

The knocking on the door. The white uniforms on my doorstep. The words I'd heard in countless military movies. The earth-shattering scream. The wave of nausea, followed by the collapse of my six-month pregnant body into the red couch of our living room.

*What's happening?*

*This isn't real.*

*Where's Brian?*

"Mama, are these daddy's friends?" My one- and three-year-old children were both looking to me for answers as I pleaded through my own tear-streaked eyes to these three men for the same.

As Gold Star families, each of us has a moment like this; a specific memory, a piece of time forever cemented in our minds and hearts as to when everything changed. Time would move forward, but our lives would never be the same.

It was May 20, 2018, when I learned my husband, Brian J Bugge, an ensign in the U.S. Navy, a father to our two, and soon-to-be-three children, a Sailor, a son, a brother, a friend, an adventurer and the love of my life, had died in an off-duty scuba diving accident. He had sailed our 36-foot yellow sailboat across the Pacific Ocean only 10 months earlier on our PCS move from Washington to Hawaii. He had cried when I told him on Christmas morning that I was pregnant with baby number three. And with coffee-scented lips, he had kissed me goodbye on the morning of May 20, as he headed for a day of adventure and to complete his last closed-circuit rebreather scuba diving class in order to complete the advanced certification.

We were living our dream life together in paradise, and then it all came crashing down. In a single instant, I found myself alone, six months pregnant with a one and three-year-old, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, completely unprepared.

The year following Brian's death was filled with more excruciating times. Moving away from our home and giving birth to our daughter, knowing she'd never meet her dad, I battled suicidal thoughts and severe depression. I had to figure out how to raise three children on my own, one of them being a newborn, and figure out how to manage their emotional needs in addition to my own. Would I go back to work? School? Where would we live? I had never been a hands-on military spouse prior to this, so I had to figure out quickly how to navigate military jargon, benefits, resources, and contacts. If you're reading this, chances are good you've been through something similar and had to do the same. You understand it's a steep learning curve and takes a certain amount of emotional capacity to work through. These benefits are there to help your family, but are only there because one of the people you love most in the world is no longer here. It's a psychological factor you don't expect to encounter during this process, but one that I battled deeply with during the first year.

I'd say it was around the five-month mark that I took a breath for the first time. A real breath. The kind of breath you feel in every cell of your body, that you hold and exhale slowly, that somehow is exactly what you needed but that you just weren't capable of managing until just the right moment. This was the moment for me.

I was driving my three children to the grocery store, and I stopped at a red light. The two and four-year-old were bickering in the back seat about something, but I tuned them out. They were safe in their car seats, they had their snacks, and I knew if I hit all the red lights on the drive into town, it would give me twentyish minutes of "me" time to zone out. I pulled up to a perfectly-timed red light and closed my eyes. I'd felt a slight shift in my overall psyche the few days prior, and I knew if I had made it this far and through everything life had thrown at me in the prior five months, I'd be able to get through literally anything ahead of me from here. I closed my eyes, took that much-needed deep breath, and made a promise to myself in that moment. If I was going to get through this, if I was going to find a way to pull myself out of this depression, to





not let my husband's death take both of us, I needed something to look forward to. I needed a distraction. I needed something to get excited about, to plan for in the future and to show my kids that no matter what, we are all in this together and can have an incredible life together, as a family.

So, the planning began. This time it wasn't the planning of how to end my life, but rather how to live it. And not just live it, but thrive in it. To take advantage of every moment and every opportunity that came toward us. I drove home from the store that day a changed woman, knowing I was going to make it through and my kids and I would do incredible things together. That afternoon I sat down at my laptop while my newborn slept next to me, and I started planning a trip. Not just any trip, but a "no bucket list" trip, a once-in-a-lifetime, no holds barred, get out there and enjoy life kind of trip. This is what I needed to distract myself, to give myself something to wake up and look forward to, to plan for in the future and to provide healing to my children and me. The planning consumed me and ended up being exactly what I needed.

Seven months later, with my three children and two dear friends in tow, we were wheels up, the six of us headed out for a two-month, eight-country trip through the continent of Europe that included the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, Greece, Malta, Ireland and Iceland. Each country was chosen for a very specific, very personal reason and each that would provide moments of healing for us. We spent these two months mourning, celebrating, laughing, crying, enjoying each other, and, most importantly, creating memories as a family.

We still have a lot of healing to do. We still miss Brian every single day. The kids miss their dad, I miss my best friend, and there's a huge void left in the world from the incredible man he was to all of us. However, we have decided as family to move forward and to let his loss teach us that tomorrow is not guaranteed. We've made the

decision as a family to live a life with no bucket list, to set goals and take the steps to reach them instead of saving them for another day, and we hope to inspire others to do the same.

We have now settled in the Pacific Northwest, but in between school, sports and household responsibilities, we spend our time traveling and creating memories as much as possible. Isabel, Hudson and Adeline (now 5, 3 and 1) have authored their first book – a book written by children, for children dealing with the loss of a parent. It works through the sights, sounds and confusion from a child's perspective (their perspective) in the days and weeks following finding out their dad wouldn't be coming home again. It's titled, "A Hui Hou: Until We Meet Again," and will be available to order in the Fall of 2020 from the kids Instagram page (@thebuggebabies). I have also authored the book "Always Coming Back Home." It is a memoir of my experience being a Navy wife, the ups and downs experienced through multiple deployments, time apart, making the moments count, and experiencing such a profound loss at the age of 34 while six months pregnant.

To see what Ashley and her children are up to now, visit them at [www.ashleybugge.com/blog](http://www.ashleybugge.com/blog), or connect with her on social media at [www.facebook.com/ashleybuggexo](https://www.facebook.com/ashleybuggexo) and [www.instagram.com/ashleybugge](https://www.instagram.com/ashleybugge).

### Suicide Awareness

Suicide is a serious concern in military communities; service members and their families deal with a great number of stressors. You can help reduce the risk of suicide. Pay attention to those around you – or reach out to talk to someone if you feel you can't cope.



## Compassion in a Time of Need, a Mother's Journey

By Kathy Ann Sheehy, Gold Star Mother

Kathy Ann Sheehy, a Gold Star mother, recently visited Naval Support Activity Mid-South, Millington, Tennessee, to meet Rosendo Lindo, the Navy Casualty Assistance Operations case manager who provided assistance when her son, Navy Lt. Matthew Parker Klopfer, died.

To schedule the visit, Sheehy had reached out to Nayla Mosley, her Gold Star coordinator in Washington, D.C., who contacted Diana Bureson, NSA Mid-South Gold Star coordinator. Through the coordination of the Navy Gold Star Program, Navy Casualty Assistance Operations and Cmdr. Colleen Lowe, Sheehy met with Lindo on March 6, nearly seven years since first speaking to him by phone. The visit resulted in Sheehy sharing her positive experience with Navy Casualty Assistance Operations, and specifically, Lindo.

Sheehy said she now realizes she is experiencing traumatic grief. She has received therapy for PTSD, and said it is now evident that the major trauma she experienced is related to her treatment by those involved in the investigative process.

When asked about the trauma related to notification by the Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO), Sheehy replied, "I guess people assume that notification was my most traumatic memory. It makes sense, as the name alone implies tragedy; however, my experience with Mr. Lindo and our personal CACO, Lt. Justin Hamilton, did not cause lasting trauma. Both men infused compassion, empathy and sensitivity."

Sheehy said she felt compelled to meet Lindo and share with him the impact he had in her journey through traumatic grief. She firmly believes that if everyone had treated her with the same empathy and honesty, she would have incurred less trauma.

"Mr. Lindo let me know he was listening, not just hearing, my words; he felt my pain. At the time, I thought it was a unique experience to me, but after meeting him, I realize that I was not

unique; it was he who is unique, an authentic and intuitive soul who senses ones suffering, developing an individualized approach to assistance," said Sheehy.

Sheehy told Lindo, "You helped me stop crying long enough to listen and turned my tears to laughter. If everyone had treated me like you and Justin, I believe I would not have experienced this degree of lasting traumatic grief."

Sheehy presented Lindo with her copy of "We Regret to Inform You: A Survival Guide for Gold Star Parents and Those Who Support Them," written by Joanne Steen. As for the CACO, Justin Hamilton, who spoke those fateful words to her, she keeps in touch with him, and her family considers him an honorary member of the Sheehy clan. "Justin is forever in my heart," she said.





## When Gold Star Grief Collides with COVID-19

*By Joanne Steen, MS, NCC, Gold Star Widow*

Adjusting to life during a pandemic has been a struggle for all of us. As the weeks have dragged by, we've watched the infection rate and death toll rapidly increase, witnessed the emotional toll COVID-19 has taken on the healthcare profession, and saw miles-long food lines of hungry Americans, all while we've been living under quarantine restrictions and growing more antsy with each passing day. Each of these events is unsettling on its own, but together they've added up to a heap of negative changes and unconventional losses that are hard to absorb in just a few weeks.

One segment of the general public, the 250,000+ family members who have lost a service member in the line of duty, struggles in a different way with the repercussions of this pandemic. Called Gold Star families, these individuals are finding that COVID-19 has pushed both their love-of-country and grief-related hot buttons. As a remarried Gold Star widow, I felt something familiar about my reactions once COVID-19 reached American shores, and recognized this familiarity as grief, even though my late husband was killed in the line of duty more than 20 years ago. After reaching out to the Gold Star community, I found I wasn't alone in feeling this way.

Why would Gold Star families be impacted like this by the coronavirus pandemic? Let's take a look at what's happening in America because of COVID-19 through the lens of a Gold Star family member.

### **Gold Star families are protective of America.**

Speaking as a Gold Star family member, we hold America close to our hearts, especially when she's wounded. We are patriotic and proud. And we take any type of threat to the country personally, because our loved ones gave their lives in service to protect and defend it. We hate to see America wounded or threatened, regardless of how it happened.

The crisply-folded American flag that once covered our loved one's casket was presented to us "on behalf of a grateful nation" and fused us to the nation and flag in ways that only another person who has received one can understand. Trust me, I know.



### 9/11 is in the news again.

The last national tragedy that brought America to its knees was the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks of 2001. Anyone of age on that fated day experienced the terror of that attack on our homeland and can undoubtedly remember the rampant fear and anxiety, especially in the earliest hours, days, weeks and months. In today's world, once COVID-19 invaded the country, the benchmarks of 9/11 were used as comparisons to this current national trauma: the death toll first, then response modes, and now models of moving forward.

Many Gold Star families view 9/11 as the touchstone to life-changing loss, for it's the primary reason many of their loved ones volunteered for military service. And in the compelling words of one anonymous Gold Star father, "Bin Laden signed my son's death warrant on 9/11," referring to the Al Qaeda leader who ordered the 9/11 attacks. This father's sentiment nailed the feelings of many. The passage of time has not lessened the emotional intensity of 9/11 for many Gold Star families, and when that day is referenced in the global media the intensity returns anew.



### Gold Star families are sensitive to loss and grief.

Many people are sensitive to loss and grief, and Gold Star families don't corner the market on it. However, most families of the fallen can identify with a number of COVID-19 death characteristics: the inability to be with their loved ones in their final moments, or the fear that he or she died alone; no chance to view the body and "see for themselves" the reality of death; no control over autopsy decisions or burial options; and a national identity attached to the loss, such as "COVID-19 deaths" or "line-of-duty deaths." Any of these familiar circumstances undoubtedly pushed buttons in Gold Star families. I know one or two did with me.

What we as a nation don't recognize as losses are the changes brought on by the pandemic. While you may not initially think of them as losses, the COVID-19 safety measures are losses. And each adds a tinge of grief to our overflowing bucket of anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and now traces of grief.

What are the losses that are added to our anxiety buckets? Apart from the personal loss of a loved one or the financial loss of a job and income, some others are:

- Plentiful food and supplies
- Praying together in churches, synagogues and places of worship
- In-person schools and universities
- Shrinking 401k's and other savings
- Amateur and professional sports
- Social gatherings
- Outdoor recreation
- Safety for the future
- Clothes shopping in a store
- And haircuts!

It's not a complete list, and you can surely personalize it. But these losses all add up – big and small alike. And when we have things that are taken away from us, we feel grief, which is a normal and expected reaction to losses of any kind. Grief isn't a dirty word, so let's call our feelings for what they are, then plop them into our anxiety bucket for COVID-19.

Speaking again as a Gold Star family member, we've had our share of traumatic loss and grief, but Gold Star families are strong. And tough. We have stood in the face of traumatic death and, not only did we survive, but we persevered. And grew stronger by doing so. Was it easy? No. Did we stumble and fall a couple of times? We sure did. And in failing a time or two, we learned that two steps forward and one step backward is still progress.

America will survive this pandemic, cope with the unknown obstacles that lie ahead, and move forward with the spirit and gumption she's known for. How do I know this? Because America, just like her Gold Star families, is strong. And tough.

Joanne Steen is a board-certified counselor and an instructor on grief, loss and resilience. She is the author of "We Regret to Inform You" (CRP, 2019) and coauthor of "Military Widow: A Survival Guide" (NIP, 2006). The blog link can be found at <https://griefsolutions.net/when-gold-star-grief-collides-with-covid-19/>.



## Navy Gold Star Community Cookbook

*By Lisa Bauch, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst*

For generations, the making and sharing of food has been a cornerstone activity for families around the world. Whether it is passing down grandma's cookie recipe, making the same sweet potatoes every year at Thanksgiving, teaching your kids how to scramble eggs, or even just requesting a certain dish every time you visit home, food brings us together. When we lose a loved one, oftentimes our memories are tangled up in our favorite dishes because of the togetherness that food inspires. This entwining can lead to both the good and the not so good, depending on how you look at it. We choose to overcome the potential pain by focusing on the good.

One way to remember and honor our loved ones is to cook their favorite dishes and share them, along with cherished memories, with family and friends. With this in mind, the Navy Gold Star Program has collected memories and recipes from the families of our fallen for the inaugural Navy Gold Star Community Cookbook. This very special first edition will be available this September, and we hope to make it an annual publication so we can continue to share memories and recipes for years to come. If you would like to contribute your loved one's favorite recipe for the 2021 edition, please send the recipe, along with your favorite memory and a photo, to [navygoldstar.fct@navy.mil](mailto:navygoldstar.fct@navy.mil), or contact your Navy Gold Star coordinator to learn more.

## Bells Across America Goes Virtual

*By Lisa Bauch, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst*

For the last five years, the Navy Gold Star Program has been honoring our fallen service members during the month of September by holding bell ringing ceremonies across the Navy. Families, friends, military and community members have been coming together to pay tribute to these heroes on the Thursday before Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day. This year we face a new challenge - social distancing. With the uncertainty in today's world due to COVID-19 and the directives to avoid large gatherings in the future, we have to alter our plans to honor and remember our fallen heroes this September. What does this mean? It means that we will be going virtual. This September, the Navy Gold Star Program will be creating virtual memorial walls that will name the fallen as a way to show the community that "We Remember." These memorials will be displayed on Navy installations worldwide and on social media sites. If you would like to ensure that your loved one's name appears on one of these walls, be sure to contact your Navy Gold Star coordinator to find out more. As a small thank you for their sacrifices, family members who reach out to their coordinator will also receive a printed copy of the artwork used to display their loved one's names.





## Chaplain's Corner: Be Kind

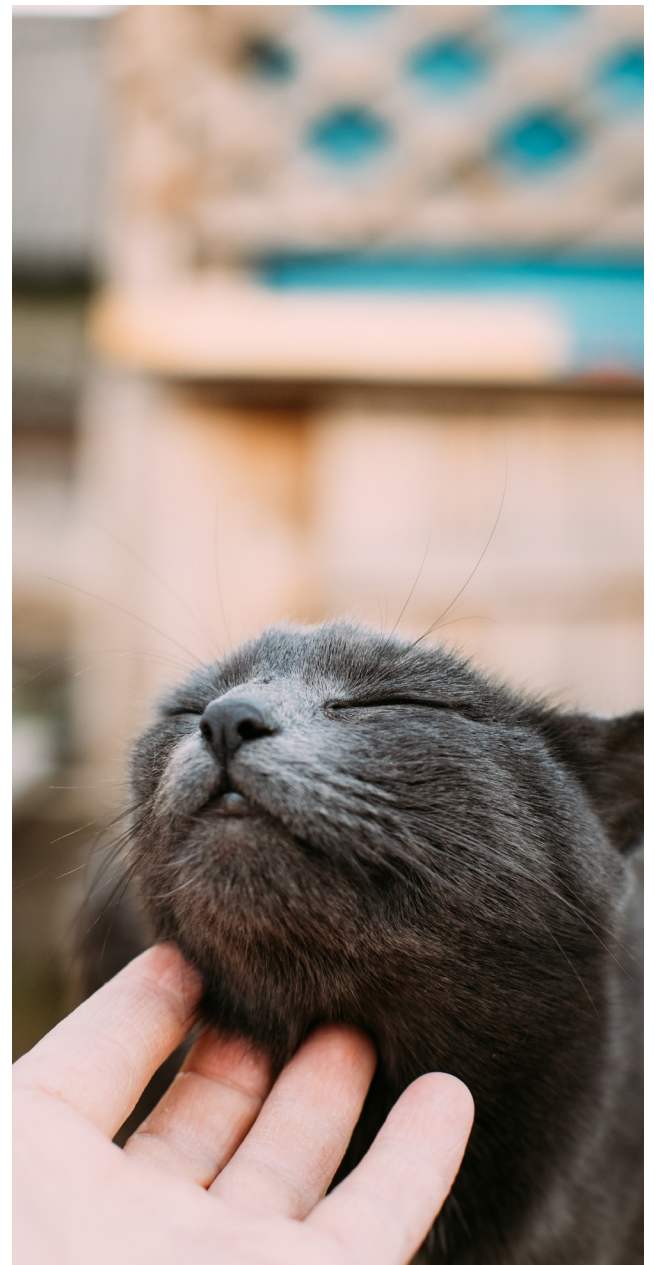
*By CNIC Force Chaplain's Office*

Be kind. How differently would our world look if we all complied? News sources clearly indicate that random acts of violence grab far more headlines. On the other hand, random acts of kindness often languish as shrouded secrets that are seldom discussed openly.

Kindness is a lifesaver – literally! Random acts of kindness, especially stealth actions drawing little to no attention to the initiator, are critically important to our well-being. Kindness is the glue that holds our community together locally, statewide, nationally and internationally. There is a clear illustration of this in the Holy Bible in its first book, Genesis. The short of it: Envy and jealousy rise up. A brother, Cain, kills his brother, Abel. God calls Cain to accountability. Cain spits out a hostile and remarkably rhetorical question to God: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Kindness is a higher moral standard. Not because of some external rule, but because kindness is the right “state of being” and “state of doing.” Common life experiences routinely demonstrate the significance of kindness in our world. Remember the popular song from 1972, “Lean on Me,” which the late Bill Withers penned and sang so beautifully? At some point in our lives we need someone to lean on. At other points in our lives we are positioned at the right place, at the right time, to be the person who is offering a shoulder for someone to safely lean on. So, the importance of kindness in our world can be summarized simply: We are either a part of someone’s solution or we are a part of someone’s problem.

What a novel moral imperative! Be kind.





# Navy Gold Star Program Directory

Name	Phone	Address*
NAVY REGION SOUTHWEST REGIONAL COORDINATOR	619-532-2886	FFSP / 937 N HARBOR DR BOX 53 SAN DIEGO CA 92132-0058
NB VENTURA COUNTY INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	805-982-6018	FFSC / 1000 23RD AVE BLDG 1169 CODE N91 PORT HUENEME CA 93041
NAVBASE CORONADO INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	619-767-7225	FFSC / BUILDING G SAUFLEY RD SAN DIEGO CA 92135-7138
NB SAN DIEGO INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	619-556-2190	NB SAN DIEGO FFSC 3005 CORBINA ALLEY STE 1 BLDG 259 SAN DIEGO CA 92136-5190
NAVY REGION NORTHWEST REGIONAL COORDINATOR	360-396-2708	FFSC / 610 DOWELL ST BLDG 35 KEYPORT WA 98345
SMOKEY POINT SUPPORT COMPLEX INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	425-304-3721	SMOKEY POINT SUPPORT COMPLEX 13910 45TH AVE NE SUITE 857 MARYSVILLE WA 98271
NAVY REGION SOUTHEAST REGIONAL COORDINATOR	904-542-5712	FFSC / BLDG 919 LANGLEY ST NAS JACKSONVILLE FL 32212-0102
NAS JACKSONVILLE INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	904-542-5706	FFSC / 554 CHILD ST NAS JACKSONVILLE FL 32212
NSA MID-SOUTH INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	901-874-5017	FFSC / 5722 INTEGRITY DR BLDG 456 MILLINGTON TN 38054-5045
NCBC GULFPORT INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	228-871-4569	FFSC / 5301 SNEAD ST GULFPORT MS 39501-5001
NAS CORPUS CHRISTI INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	361-961-1675	FFSC / 11001 D ST CORPUS CHRISTI TX 78419-5021
NAVAL DISTRICT WASHINGTON REGIONAL COORDINATOR	202-433-3059	FFSC / 2691 MITSCHER RD SW BLDG 414 WASHINGTON DC 20373
NAVAL DISTRICT WASHINGTON INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	202-685-1909	FFSC / 2691 MITSCHER RD SW BLDG 414 WASHINGTON DC 20373
NAVY REGION MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL COORDINATOR	757-445-3073	FFSC / 7928 14TH ST SUITE 209 NORFOLK VA 23505-1219
NWS EARLE INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	732-866-2110	FFSC / 201 RT 34 BLDG C59 COLTS NECK NJ 07722
NAVSTA GREAT LAKES INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	847-688-3603 ext. 127	FFSC / 525 FARRAGUT AVE STE 300 BLDG 26 GREAT LAKES IL 60088
NB NORFOLK INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	757-322-9182	FFSC / 7928 14TH ST SUITE 102 NORFOLK VA 23505-1219
SUBASE NEW LONDON INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	860-694-1257	FFSC / BLDG 83 BOX 93 GROTON CT 06349-5093
NAS OCEANA INSTALLATION COORDINATOR	757-492-8282	2073 TARTAR AVENUE, BUILDING 585, FFSC AT DAM NECK ANNEX, VIRGINIA BEACH VA 23461-1917

\*When communicating with your coordinator via mail, please add NAVY GOLD STAR PROGRAM and contact column info to all mailing addresses to ensure delivery.