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General lands in Estherville

General Tim Orr says he visits National Guard posts to ensure "best trained and equipped" force

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Amy H. Peterson - Staff Writer (apeterson@esthervilleneews.net) , Estherville News

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Major General Timothy E. Orr has been Iowa's Adjutant General for over eight years, and is the Director of the Iowa Department of Public Defense, reporting directly to the governor.

Orr's helicopter landed in Estherville Tuesday morning, and toured the Estherville Armory.

"This is a premiere facility, and is leading the way in shared usage," Orr said of the partnership with the Regional Wellness Center.

Article Photos



Orr spoke to an invited crowd, which included Mayor Kenny Billings, Dr. Lisa Stich, new Executive Dean at Iowa Lakes Community College, several local law enforcement officers, Estherville Lincoln Central High School Principal Brad Leonard, and new activities director Scott Stokes, and numerous members of the Iowa National Guard.

Orr said he would submit a letter of support for the U.S. Veterans Affairs clinic to locate in Estherville.

"I'm not sure how much influence it will have, but it couldn't hurt," Orr said.

The Iowa National Guard has among its specialties cybersecurity.

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"Cyber networks are one of the biggest threats in today's world," Orr said.

In 2016, some of the biggest moments of cybersecurity threats happened, including the largest-known distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, a phishing attack on a U.S. presidential candidate's campaign, and ransomware attacks on major healthcare organizations.

"We are always prepared," Orr said. "Iowa is very well equipped."

Iowa currently has about 9,000 Air National Guard members, including an F-16 unit, a cybersecurity team, and specialists who operate MQ9 drones. The National Guard works with Dr. Jacobson at Iowa State University on cybersecurity.

"Companies seek our people out," Orr said.

Orr also oversees about 8,600 members of the Army National Guard in 48 installments across the state.

Orr's leadership team includes Command Sgt. Maj. Rachel Fails, the first female senior Enlisted Leader for the Iowa National Guard; [Wyboney senior aviator, Iowa Air Guard]; Lt. Col. Kevin Kruse, director of IT; Col. Steve Osborn, Operations Officer Training and Brigade Commander of 3,500 in Boone, known as the Red Bulls; Col. Greg Hapgood, public affairs officer; [Rausch and Coble]

During the peak of the Iraq and Afghanistan war, Iowa had 3,500 service members deployed. As the war operations have phased out, there have been as few as under 100, with a small spike back to 450, Orr said.

Airmen are being deployed to Kuwait and Iraq to provide aviation support on a five year cycle.

"Sometimes there were only seven days between orders and deployment during the beginning of the war," Orr said. Usually now there is two years' notice of orders, and guard members have plenty of time to make arrangements.

The guard units provide a path to college education, Orr said.

One in seven guard members is a college student.

Orr said, "We provide 100 percent tuition assistance to the community colleges, University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and UNI, and a public equivalent for tuition to Iowa private colleges."

The guard, in addition to education, grows leaders who are physically fit, have leadership and specific field training, health care and life insurance, among other benefits.

"A young person comes out of service 10 years ahead of where they would be," Orr said.

Orr said Iowa's Home Base Iowa program is a boon to the state. "I'm proud of what we have done to keep [veterans] here in Iowa with their families. They are the kind of people in communities who will step up to the plate and meet volunteer needs."

Orr is also on the Governor's STEM board.

"We do more STEM in a day than any business in Iowa,"

The unit in Estherville brings \$7 million into the community, between money spent by out of town guard members, purchase of support items and supplies, and federal dollars coming in, Orr said.

"That's money directly back into the community," Orr said.

"It's not your father's or grandfather's national guard," Orr said.

For training a reduced military force, the guard forms partnerships with active duty units, training with units at Ft. Riley, Kansas and Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

"This makes our preparation seamless. We won't let yourselves fall of a cliff," Orr said.

Orr said of the many young people who join the guard, "We are responsible for young men and women that parents give to us. We want to be the best trained and equipped we can be because we take the safety of each and every one seriously."

After Orr's talk, members of the community checked out the supplies and ammunition stored at the facility, and played in the weapons simulation room.

Orr said, "These visits allow me to walk around facilities with staff and find out what's working and what they need. I need this gut check of each facility so I know how to best serve them."

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