



# News Release

## WISCONSIN ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Joint Force Headquarters ■ 2400 Wright Street ■ Madison WI ■ 53704

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### **NEWS: Adjutant General holds e-town hall**

The Wisconsin National Guard's latest method to communicate with family members of deployed soldiers and airmen really clicked.

Brig. Gen. Donald Dunbar led what was dubbed an "e-town hall for families" Thursday, June 25 from the offices of the Joint Force Headquarters in Madison. As many as 60 family members took part in the roughly hour-long online chat, which ran the gamut from questions about equipment and redeployment to operational security concerns and care package ideas.

Dunbar was surrounded by five laptops and several other service members, who helped moderate the session and provide answers to questions. The tempo was quick as questions were posted and answers composed in real time.

"How are you holding up with the deployment?" Dunbar asked early in the session. "I know it can be very tough when your soldier/airman is deployed." One family member replied that technology allowed for greater opportunities to communicate, which was making this deployment easier to deal with.

The online town hall session is one of the methods the Wisconsin National Guard is using to communicate with internal and external audiences. The organization has also launched a new website, <http://dma.wi.gov>, that includes news and deployment updates as well as job postings and flag lowering announcements, and offers visitors the ability to subscribe to receive email or text messages when information is updated. The public affairs office also recently launched a Flickr photo sharing site, <http://www.flickr.com/wiguardpics>, and the Wisconsin Family Program hosts a private Flickr site, accessible by invitation only, that gives family members a safe place to share photos with other families and their soldier or airman.

According to Maj. Jackie Guthrie, public affairs director for the Wisconsin National Guard, social media tools such as online chats and Flickr are the methods by which many soldiers and airmen communicate today, and meeting them where they are talking is one way to ensure they are getting important information. "We continue to explore other social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and may launch sites in the future. Our goal is to maximize the use of technology to get messages to our audiences wherever they are and in the format that they prefer. These mediums also increase two-way communications so it's a win-win for everyone."

This was underscored by comments during the online town hall, which revealed that some family members live hours away from their family support groups and consequently don't feel like they are always receiving the most current information. The online session allowed one participant to learn how to contact the American Red Cross to get a message to a deployed family member in case of an emergency.

An online poll at the end of the session indicated everyone who participated found the experience valuable. The next family chat is being planned for September.

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Story with photos can be found online at: <http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/2009news/09058.asp>

**Captions:**

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**Brig. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin, prepares a response as Maj. Jackie Guthrie, public affairs director for the Wisconsin National Guard, and Col. Ken Koon, director of manpower and personnel, assist during a live online town hall with family members of deployed service members Thursday, June 25 at the Joint Force Headquarters in Madison. The Wisconsin National Guard is beginning to use new social media tools as it seeks to keep the lines of communication open with official and public audiences. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn R. Larson**

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