

Katy's **ARMY** *Wives & Husbands*

*Supporting Their Soldiers
by Keeping the Home
Fires Burning*

*Written by Wendy Clark
Photography by Suzi Issa*

Amanda Stephens and her daughter, Skyla are proud of their Katy soldier, PFC Jeffrey Stephens, who is in training to become a combat medic

In the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, pride in our nation was visible everywhere. Who can forget how Katy looked, bedecked with American flags and “God Bless America” on nearly every marquee in town? Since then, the U.S. has been involved in the War on Terror in the Middle East, and our military personnel work hard every day to support the mission across the world.



MAJ Sharon Wu Nitsche and Chris Nitsche, and their daughter, Katelyn are an Army strong family



Jeffrey and Amanda Stephens, with their daughter, Skyla

But what about those left behind, those “silent soldiers” who keep the home fires burning and make sacrifices of their own in support of the mission? In a very real sense, the spouses of those in the military are serving enlistments of their own in the challenges they face every day. *Katy Magazine* salutes the wives (and husbands!) of our U.S. soldiers, and invites you to meet some of Katy’s own army wives.

Staying Strong for Her Soldier

Amanda Stephens of Katy is the wife of Private First Class (PFC) Jeffrey Stephens. They are proud parents of Skyla, age 6. The Stephens family is relatively new to army life, as PFC Stephens enlisted in March of this year. Currently, he is located in San Antonio at Fort Sam Houston completing advanced individual training (AIT) to become a combat medic. Amanda and Skyla live in Katy, and, though her husband hasn’t yet deployed, Amanda is already discovering what life as an army wife is like.

“The hardest part so far was when he was in boot camp, and I had to go 10 weeks without seeing him,” she says. “And my daughter was always asking when he was coming home.” Before he joined the army, PFC Stephens worked in the oil industry and Amanda says she hated seeing him miserable when he went to work.

Now, she is glad he has a job he respects and enjoys and is grateful for the health benefits that come with his new career. Having never lived outside of Texas, she faces the uncertainty of finding out where they will move next as a family. Still, Stephens takes it all in stride, and considers the chance to see new places an adventure. “I can see a better future for all of us,” she says.

Making the Most of Time Together

Tracy Willis was born and raised in Katy, and her parents still call Katy home. Her husband, Scott has served in the army for 11 years and is currently an active duty staff sergeant (SSG). Together, they have two children, Kelsey, 8 and Kyla, 3. They are also eagerly expecting a baby girl, Faith, in early 2011. Tracy is open about her experience as an army wife. “It is a constant balancing act, and it seems you are always adjusting your plans,” she says. “You have to give up precious time with your husband that you assumed you would not have to because he was not scheduled to leave.” She adds, “We have learned to make the most of the time we have as a family.”

Willis says staying strong through deployments is one of the biggest challenges of being an army wife. “It is hard when you suddenly become, in a sense, a single mom,” she says. “Everything falls on you. You are Mom and Dad.” Children are especially affected, she says. “You have to explain to them that Daddy loves them,” she shares. “He didn’t want to leave and will be home as soon as he can.”

When SSG Willis is deployed, he keeps in touch with his family via email, chat, webcam, and phone, and Tracy finds solace and support from other army wives online, on base, and through her family readiness group (FRG). An FRG is made up of a service member’s unit family and often hosts gatherings for the family members to interact and stay connected while their loved one is away. “My biggest reward is knowing that I am supporting my husband, who is serving our country and keeping all of us free and safe,” says Willis.

Supporting His Army Wife

Chris Nitsche isn't a Katy army wife. Instead, he is a Katy army husband and is married to Major (MAJ) Sharon Wu Nitsche. They make their home in Katy, along with their daughter Katelyn, 8, and pets, Sagwa and Daisy. MAJ Nitsche joined the U.S. Army in 1986 and has over 20 years of experience as an officer in the U.S. Army Reserves and the National Guard. Her love of country is heartfelt and is the reason she continues to serve her nation. "It is my honor to serve my country, [which allowed] me to immigrate here as a young child and [offered] me the opportunities to achieve anything, [without] limits [as] a Chinese female," she shares.

Chris' sacrifices come from the heart, too. While MAJ Nitsche was on assignment in 2006, it was unclear when she would return, possibly having to be gone as long as 18 months. During her absence, Chris gave up his career to be a stay-at-home dad. He also made sure she knew what he and Katelyn were doing in their day-to-day lives by emailing photos and updates to his wife. Though it can be hard, Chris says that looking forward to when his wife returns and they can be a family again is a reward all its own.

He offers words of advice for those who are separated from their spouse. "A person must be strong and patient, and hope goes a

long way," he says. "We can never pray enough for the well-being of our soldiers." He adds, "Stay strong and open-minded. Always have close neighbors when family members are too far away." The Nitsche family is active in their FRG, and looks forward to attending the Army Family Strong Bonds event next year to help strengthen their family.

Katelyn has also participated in camps sponsored by Operation Military Kids, getting a chance to meet other kids like her who

have one or dual parent military families. The Nitsches encourage Katy residents to get involved in actively supporting the troops by sending thank you cards and letters of encouragement to service members who are serving away from home.

"My biggest reward is knowing that I am supporting my husband, who is serving our country and keeping all of us free and safe."

— Tracy Willis

How You Can Help

Katyites can help make a difference in the lives of military families by offering support during times of deployment. Simple gestures like inviting a military family to be a part of holiday celebrations can make the lonely days and nights a bit easier to bear. Best of all, knowing that their loved ones have support allows deployed soldiers to more easily focus their attention on successfully completing their mission, so they can return home sooner. **KM**

WENDY CLARK is a former army wife, a navy sister, a Marine cousin, and an army and navy granddaughter.

A woman always desires to look the best she can.

*But great skin, hair, eyes and lips
are only a frame for a*

Smile!

A great smile makes a great picture.

*With Dr. Charles A. Ray III, a complimentary
smile evaluation takes just twenty minutes.*



DENTISTRY BY RSE

23855 CINCO RANCH BLVD., SUITE 240, KATY, TX 77494 PHONE: (281) 391-4422 FAX: (281) 391-4424
WWW.KATYDDS.COM



The Nitsches stay connected with other military families through their family readiness group

PANDORA™
UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

LovePods

PANDORA PRESENTS LOVEPODS, NOW IN BOTH WHITE AND YELLOW 18K GOLD. COME SEE OUR BEAUTIFUL PANDORA SHOP, FEATURING OUR ENHANCED COLLECTION OF LOVEPODS.

beau kisses

LA CENTERRA AT CINCO RANCH
23501 CINCO RANCH BLVD.
KATY, TEXAS 77494 • 281.395.4445

U.S. Pat. No. 2,987,302 • © • All rights reserved • PANDORA JEWELRY.COM • PANDORA.NET

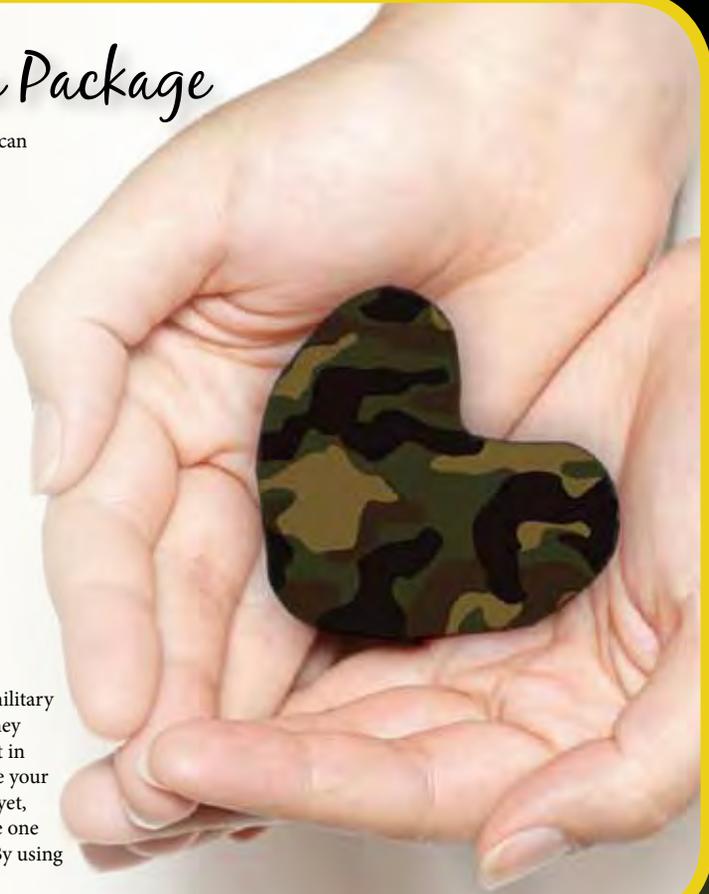
Send Your Soldier a Care Package

The U.S. Postal Service offers special flat-rate boxes for care packages that can be shipped to military addresses for a low fee. Popular items requested by service members include:

- ♥ Letters and news from home
- ♥ The latest issue of *Katy Magazine*
- ♥ Coffee
- ♥ Cookies
- ♥ Personal hygiene items
- ♥ Hard candies, such as Jolly Ranchers
- ♥ Pictures, both photos and children's drawings
- ♥ Greeting cards
- ♥ Home-baked goodies

Help Keep Our Troops Safe

Operational Security or OPSEC is the term used to describe the need for discretion when discussing dates, times, and locations in relation to U.S. military personnel. Being specific about where your loved one is deployed, when they are coming home, or what time their plane arrives may seem harmless, but in reality can be dangerous to your service member's unit. When asked where your soldier is located, be as general as you can when giving answers, or, better yet, respond, "That's top secret!" with a smile. On the other hand, if you are the one doing the asking, don't ask for details or press for a more specific answer. By using discretion, civilians can do their part to keep our troops safe and secure.



Women Specialists of Katy

21700 Kingsland Blvd. Suite 203
281-398-2140 www.wsokaty.com

- Routine Gynecologic Care
- Specializing in Minimally Invasive Surgery
 - Laparoscopic Hysterectomy
 - Low and High Risk Obstetrics
- Novasure Procedure for Abnormal Bleeding
 - Essure (No-Scar) Sterilization
- Preconception Care and Counseling

Bethany Peterson, M.D.

Catherine Corovessis, M.D.