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**'ONCE A
MILITARY WIFE,
ALWAYS A
MILITARY WIFE'**

Rapidly growing **Army Wife Network**
adds content for transitioning service
families and veterans

cover story

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ



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From left: Crystal Niehoff; Niehoff with her family; Channel 5 News in Washington, D.C., interviewing Niehoff at the DC Metro Station, and (opposite page) Caroline Schafer, AWN's Army Wife Talk Radio administrator, Niehoff, and Debbie Cunningham, AWN's virtual administrator.

A rmy Wife Network (AWN), the largest and longest-running podcast, website and content-provider for military spouses by military spouses is poised to become a whole lot bigger, dramatically expanding its mission to encompass transitioning service families and veterans' families.

Under the leadership of Crystal Niehoff, who took over Army Wife Network as owner and chief executive in 2016, the popular podcast and website is launching a new series of podcasts, blogs and other content to appeal to a broader range of military families by the end of 2019. "The saying is 'once a soldier, always a soldier,'" explains Niehoff. "But the same is true of military spouses: 'once a military wife, always a military wife.'"

"AWN serves military spouses that are now part of this journey, but we've noticed there's a gulf among our transitioning spouses," Niehoff continues. "As a spouse myself of a service member who is looking at retirement, I began searching for information and resources and noticed that the transitioning spouses are largely underserved. So, in an effort to bridge this gap, AWN will be including blogs, resources and podcasts geared for transitioning spouses so they know their journey is just as serious and relevant."

That personal connection fueled Niehoff's decision to take over AWN from founder Tara Crooks and her business partner Starlett "Star" Henderson, who created AWN in 2009 as an umbrella that joined what was previously known as Army Wife Talk Radio (AWTR), Field Problems (FP) and Loving A Soldier (LAS) blog. AWTR is the longest-running talk radio show and podcast of its kind, with a live Twitter chat feature during the weekly, two-hour, live show at 8 p.m. ET on Monday nights. AWTR boasts more than 55,000+ podcast downloads per month, and AWN has more than 100,000 followers across social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube.

"I grew up with little connection to, or knowledge of, the military except for what I had read about it in the news or saw on TV, so when I married my service member, I was pretty naive," Niehoff recalls. "In an effort to learn more about being a military spouse, living the military lifestyle, and Army acronyms—so I could understand what my husband was talking about—I began searching the internet for information and resources, which led me straight to Army Wife Network."

"What I found with AWN was a community of real people who were facing the same issues, problems and challenges that I was facing," she continues. "They were just like me, and, finally, I had the sense that I was not alone."

Niehoff began blogging for AWN and then became social media coordinator. When the founder announced her retirement, Niehoff stepped in. "I just couldn't imagine Army Wife Network not existing for other military spouses after I had benefitted so much!" she declares. AWN currently has 11 volunteers, who form



the core leadership and support team, and more than 20 experienced bloggers, all of them military spouses, veterans or family members. The company is funded by sponsors and limited, select advertising.

"After a decade and a half of continuous war against terror, military families are war-weary," Niehoff notes. "We strive to provide a positive, encouraging atmosphere through inspiring blog posts, exciting guests, and uplifting, even humorous social media posts in an effort to build the morale among the military families we serve."

AWN will take a similar educational and inspirational approach to its new content for transitioning families and veterans. "Many transitioning service members and spouses go back to school, or are looking for jobs, and their traditional roles are changing," Niehoff explains. "Our goal is to speak to them in a way that will help them in their journeys."

For additional information, please visit ArmyWifeNetwork.com. (Army Wife Network is not affiliated with the Department of Defense or any branch of the Armed Services.)

Person-to-Person

The Army Wife Network (AWN) is all about people helping others adjust to the vagaries and challenges of military life. Crystal Niehoff says military spouses often share with her their heart-warming stories of personal connection.

"I absolutely love it when I receive feedback from military spouses about how AWN has impacted them!" she says. "One gal shared with me that after arriving at her first duty station with her new husband, she made a new friend through AWN's Facebook page. She posted on our page asking

if anyone was in close location to her and through the interaction on her post, she met her first military wife friend."

Niehoff tells another story of a military spouse who first discovered AWN back in 2011. "She had moved to her first duty station less than a year prior when she discovered Army Wife Network just four months into her first deployment," she says. "She said that she appreciated how AWN has so much helpful information to help send creative care packages, offered her the chance to connect with other military

spouses, and most importantly, she said that AWN made her feel like she wasn't alone."

Family on AWN!

Tune in to hear Family president and publisher Joseph R. Mugnai on the Army Wife Network podcast on Monday, Aug. 5, 2019, at approximately 8:30 p.m. EDT. Mugnai will discuss the magazine's longstanding service to the military community as well as other topics.