

# Seminar helps families of those who serve

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

**L**AURA CZARNEY of Berkeley prays that her son will return alive from Saudi Arabia.

"I worry that war will start. And he will come home in a box. He had to walk in his dad's footsteps," said Czarny, the founder of Friends of Freedom.

Tracye Johnson of Southfield and Cheryl Catchings of Ann Arbor worry about their fiancés, both in Saudi Arabia.

"I feel better when people don't keep asking me how I'm doing or how I feel," said Johnson, who plans to marry Terrance James, who is in the Navy, on May 13, the day between both their birthdays.

The three were among about 40 mothers, fathers, family members and fiancés of American servicemen and women in the Middle East who participated in a day-long stress seminar Saturday in Troy Guest Quarters Hotel with three psychologists from the Farmington Hills-based Goren & Associates.

The people at Seitz Field Air National Guard helped get the word out to support group members who participated.

"These people are under a lot of stress, more than I suspected," said psychologist Steve Goren. "The question is how do you keep positive during negative times. There is a lot of hostility on the part of these people."

ONE WAY of reducing stress is good nutrition and plenty of exercise. "Go exercise. Let it out. Don't hold it in. Don't store up all that frustration and anger," psychologist Keith Levick told participants.

The men and women told Levick that all it takes is a news report or a fond memory of their loved one to activate a stress and worry attack. "All of a sudden you hear something bad on the news," said a woman. "Then I can't sleep."

Czarny said her heart was broken when she learned through a letter from her son that some of the service people in Saudi Arabia don't get letters or packages. Her group, Friends of Freedom, went to work.

"The only thing that keeps me going is knowing that people who don't have parents are nonetheless receiving packages," said Czarny, whose son-in-law also is in Saudi Arabia.

Making matters worse is that no soldier or relative can do anything about what's happening in Saudi Arabia.

"You can't control what's going on over there. But you can control your energy level," Levick said. "Do something for yourself."

Exercise — even relaxation exercises with your hands while driving — will help relieve the tension and stress, Levick said.

AND EMOTIONS are good. "Crying is not being weak. Crying is the ability to have courage."

Many participants at the seminar, which was supported by the hotel, Liberty State Bank and the Blue Care Network, attended because they are leaders of support groups for family members of men and women in Saudi Arabia.



Steve Goren: 'These people are under a lot of stress, more than I suspected.'

Participants went home with T-shirts saying: "Operation Desert Shield. All our thoughts are with you," cassette tapes and literature about stress.

A support group leader asked how she can help those in her group without adding to her existing worry about her own son. "I want to know how to detach myself from their stories. I don't want to take that on to me," she said.

Goren reassured group leaders they are not there to solve members'

problems. "This is a global problem, not a person problem. Just be willing to listen to them. All you need to do is listen to them. But you have to talk too about your problems," Goren said.

Sue Wuolukka of Troy said she felt better when she went to North Carolina to see her 22-year-old son, James, off to Saudi Arabia. She was the only mom there who had come to say goodbye. Now she gets letters from the other service men and women who were with her son.

"They needed you for that support," Goren said. "For a lot of them they haven't been away from their mothers for a long time."

A WOMAN who began a support group two weeks ago involved Vietnam vets to lend a hand in learning how to help their sons and daughters when they return from Saudi Arabia.

"They said, 'let them talk. If you stop them they'll shut up and never say anything,'" the woman said. "The thing is to listen."

In addition to learning about nutrition and exercise, participants learned various stress-reduction techniques, how to relax and how to cope with the stress they are feeling.

"We are trying our best to help them cope with this," Goren said. "One woman told she was angry at the world. She thought of the song, 'I'll be home for Christmas, but only in my dreams.'"



Keith Levick: 'Don't hold it in. Don't store up all that frustration and anger.'



Tracye Johnson of Southfield, whose fiancé is stationed in the Middle East, laughs at remarks made by psychologist Keith Levick.



Linda Czarny of Berkeley asks questions with her granddaughter, Amanda Hecox, in her arms. Martin Hecox, Laura's son and Amanda's uncle, is in the Army.

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