

'Soldier for Life' website to be new online home for Army retirees

By C. Todd Lopez
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The Army's "Soldier for Life" website, launched May 1, is designed to be a new online home for retired Soldiers.

The Army's web portal "Army Knowledge Online" – better known as "AKO" – has been available to retirees and family members for many years now.

However, the Army is transitioning to a more secure enterprise network for business users – Soldiers, Army civilians and contractors.

Retirees will continue to be able to access important information about the Army, and information pertaining to health, retirement, employment and education benefits online at

<http://www.soldierforlife.army.mil>.

Mark E. Overberg, who serves as deputy chief of Army Retirement Services, said the new website will allow "ongoing communications with the retired community."

In February, the Army Retirement Services office was moved under the newly created Soldier for Life program, Overberg said, because retired Soldiers are "a part of the whole Soldier lifecycle – the last part of the Soldier lifecycle."

Right now on the website, retirees can also opt-in to receive a newsletter that lets them know what's going on in the Army "with a primary focus on news that retired Soldiers care about," Overberg said.

On AKO, retirees and family members had access to web-based email services that gave them a ".mil" email address.

Currently, retirees and family members are no longer able to send email from their AKO accounts or read emails within the site. What they are still able to do, however, is instruct AKO to forward any emails they might receive there to a commercial account.

The AKO website will continue forwarding emails to commercial accounts until Dec. 31.

Overberg suggests retirees and family members set up a free commercial email account to replace what AKO used to provide for them. He said after setting up such an account, they should notify family,

friends and professional contacts about the new e-mail address.

Additionally, he said, retirees and family members should contact any businesses or other websites where the AKO email address is a part of their contact information and update it to reflect the new email address.

One such site in particular to update, Overberg said, is the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's "MyPay" website, where retirees and Soldiers alike can look at their leave and earnings statements and other important documents.

To ensure that DFAS can contact them, retired Soldiers should visit the "MyPay" site and ensure that a new or non-AKO email ad-

dress is listed. Overberg said that today, some 500,000 Army retirees have MyPay accounts. Of those, he said, about 350,000 are still registered there with their AKO-provided email address.

By not signing up for a commercial email service and updating business account information, former AKO users risk not receiving important notifications.

Right now, the Soldier for Life website is extremely new. Overberg said the site is only in phase one of its development. He said there are several ideas about what will be brought aboard as the site's development progresses into phase two.

Future upgrades to the Soldier for Life website might include

a "white pages" feature similar to what was one available on AKO, Overberg said. The difference will be that the white pages-style directory will include only those retirees who "opted in" to the listing.

Also under consideration for inclusion in the next-generation of the site is a "Retired Soldiers Blog," Overberg said.

"The intent of this blog will be to provide a three-way communication: the Army to retired Soldiers, retired Soldiers to the Army and retired Soldiers to other retired Soldiers."

Overberg said that commenters to blog posts will be limited to those who have retired from the Army. "When

SOLDIER from P4

somebody posts a comment, we'll want to make sure they are a retired Soldier."

Part of making that happen, he said, is ironing out the technical details of how to authenticate retired Soldiers on the site. That might include integration of services from DOD Self-service Logon.

Overberg also said that the Soldier for Life website has been designed to be easier to use than AKO. He said he has heard complaints from retirees that AKO was too complex - and so they stayed away from the site.

The Soldier for Life program and its website is about more than just retirees. In fact, the retiree program was just recently folded into the SFL program.

"Soldier for Life" is about the entire "life-cycle" from the moment a Soldier shows up at basic training; "Start Strong" to the day they arrive at their first command and begin their Army career; "Serve Strong" to the moment they make the decision to transition from a uniform-wearing Soldier back into a productive member of civilian society; "Re-integrate Strong" to the final separation or retirement from Army service and transition into an example in their community about what it means to be a Soldier; "Remain Strong."

Lt. Col. Wenceslao G. Angulo, who serves as the communications and outreach director of the Army's Soldier for Life program, said SFL and its website aims to serve those in all four phases of being

a Soldier.

"We want to attract talented young men and women to join the Army," he said.

"The new site provides current information and links to resources for all Soldiers, which includes active duty, Army National Guard and Army Reserve," Angulo added.

"We also provide access to information and links to resources for those preparing to transition to civilian life.

With retirement services joining the Soldier for Life program, we can now provide services and information for those who have retired from the Army, but remain Soldiers for life."

For more information about the AKO transition, visit <http://ciog6.army.mil/AKOTransition/tabid/215/Default.aspx>.