

Opening up: Military families share their stories with artists to develop modern dance performance for the public

By Megan Saunders

Military members and their families have long mastered the art of resiliency. Their skill -- and the stories that spawned it -- will come together at Kansas State University with another art form: modern dance.

The Joe Goode Performance Group will work with local military members and their families to create a modern dance performance at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 27, at K-State's Nichols Theatre.

Briana Nelson Goff, professor of family studies and human services and director of the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families, said the modern dance group will meet with local families to learn their stories of resilience, then combine them with dance, song and spoken word to create a modern dance theater performance.

"They will bring these stories of resilience from service members and their families out in the performance," she said. "We asked them to think about certain things, like how they came back from a particularly difficult time, or what the word 'resilience' means to them. The dance group will take these threads of human experience and weave them together into a performance."

The Joe Goode Performance Group, from San Francisco, Calif., performed "The Rambler" in McCain Auditorium on Feb. 23. After that performance, the group stayed in Manhattan to work with the community to develop the fourth performance of its "Human Kind" series, "Human Kind: What Does it Mean to Be Resilient?"

Todd Holmberg, executive director of McCain Auditorium, said he worked with Linda Duke, director of the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, to develop the idea of reaching out to military families.

"The Joe Goode Performance Group draws upon personal stories to drive the creative process," said Holmberg. "Linda and I spoke with Joe Goode several times, and it led to the idea of connecting with individuals in our community to help them express their stories in new ways. I reached out to Dr. Goff to help us identify people willing to share their experiences. The performance will be powerful."

Nelson Goff gathered individuals from the community whose stories she knew would fit the mold. Not all were military members or their families -- participants also included caregivers or civilian employees on a military base. Some were available to be interviewed in person, while others corresponded with the Joe Goode Performance Group through Skype or email.

"We have folks all the way from the Vietnam War era to current military families," Nelson Goff said. "This is a way to bring their stories to the broader public. The hope is that when they see the

performance, whether they're connected to the military or not, they will understand the struggles. It may not be their particular story, but there are threads everyone can recognize."

After the Joe Goode Performance Group develops its "Human Kind" performance and shares it with the community, it will become part of the group's tour. Nelson Goff said it is a chance for the public to see the new performance at no cost, while becoming familiar with a different side of the military.

"On TV, we see the extremes -- the '1 percents,'" she said. "We see the high-performing soldier who has accomplished amazing feats, or the ones creating problems -- they get the media attention. But these aren't regular military families. They have stress, too, but they deal with it in different ways. We're bringing their resilience to the public in a performance."

In her work with the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families, Nelson Goff said there is a strong focus on the arts as healing and therapeutic. While this performance may not be billed as a therapeutic program, Nelson Goff said it may have a similar effect on those who are involved.

"Stories of resilience and seeing your story performed can be very healing," she said. "This is a great opportunity for soldiers, their families and the entire community."

In addition to the "Human Kind" extended residency, the Joe Goode Performance Group was involved in two other activities while on campus. The Beach Museum hosted a workshop during which Joe Goode worked with K-State students exploring identity through movement and writing. This workshop included working with displays in the museum's galleries, especially the "Museum of Wonder" exhibition. The group also worked with K-State dancers in a master class setting Tuesday morning.

Holmberg said although the "Human Kind" performance is free, tickets must be obtained in advance by calling the McCain box office at 785-532-6428.

===== You can manage your subscription for this list at:

http://listserv.ksu.edu/web?SUBED1=MCCAIN_EVENTS&A=1