



**DEPARTMENTS OF THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE**  
**ILLINOIS ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD**  
1301 North MacArthur Boulevard, Springfield, Illinois 62702-2399

January 3, 2012

National Guard Bureau  
1411 Jefferson Davis Highway  
Arlington, VA 22202-3231

Dear National Guard Bureau:

The Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office has been an elite team since I became the Adjutant General in 2007. The community relations program was solid in 2007, but the implementation of Mike Chrisman as a Community Relations Manager in January 2008 has propelled the program to higher levels.

Over the last few years the JFHQ-IL PAO community relations program has grown and has continued to develop new and innovative ways to motivate our Soldiers and Airmen to be actively involved in their communities. From top-notch Illinois National Guard speakers to honor guards and static displays, the Illinois National Guard is well represented in the community. This is the time when it is imperative for the Illinois National Guard to be active in the community to tell the good stories of our Soldiers and Airmen stateside and abroad. As proven in the past, JFHQ-IL PAO sets the standard.

Mike Chrisman has developed a great relationship with our communities and found innovative ways to get support from our Soldiers and Airmen. His dedication to his job is second to none and his drive to find a way to get support for community events is remarkable. When I talk to our Brigades, Wings and community members about Mike and the JFHQ-IL PAO community relations program I have heard nothing but positive comments.

I would highly recommend Mike Chrisman for the Keith L. Ware community relations award for individual achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William L. Enyart".

WILLIAM L. ENYART  
Major General, IL ARNG  
The Adjutant General



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**Person Nominated:** Mr. Mike Chrisman

**Position:** Community Relations Manager

**Duty Description:** Mr. Chrisman is the POC for all Community Relations/Outreach requests and critical Community Relations activities from the public and coordinates with appropriate personnel to fill requests. This includes the Speakers Bureau program, aviation support, band and honor guard requests. He coordinates on a daily and weekly basis with NGB PA, the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs - Midwest, SAF/PA and other military and veteran entities for community outreach events.



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The Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office (JFHQ-IL PAO) has continued to build a solid community relations program. It was a record year for JFHQ-IL PAO, supporting more requests in 2011 than any other in recent history. This was because Mike Chrisman, the community relations manager, took the initiative to streamline the process and created a proactive outreach approach. Continuous updates to the Speakers Bureau program were also instrumental in this year's success. In 2011, the Illinois National Guard provided speakers for nearly 200 different events.

Although the program will always be reactive as the Illinois National Guard responds to requests from the community, Mike Chrisman identified several key strategic events in Illinois and reached out to those event organizers to better focus National Guard support. This approach often led to more satisfied community leaders at less cost to the military. For example, conversations with the City of Chicago led to more Illinois National Guard vehicles, but less marching troops for the Chicago Memorial Day Parade – at less cost to the Illinois National Guard.

For these strategic events, the community relations manager asked for more information on the event and then many times recommended other assets that could enhance the event to enhance the National Guard presence and image.

Mr. Mike Chrisman was hired in January 2008 as the community relations manager. Since then he has strengthened the program and the bond between the community and the Illinois National Guard (ILNG). His tireless efforts took the program to new levels. He always finds new ways to support community requests and, in events of strategic importance or directly related to the Illinois National Guard's proud heritage, reached out to the community to volunteer ILNG support.

Statistics speak for themselves. During Chrisman's first year as community relations manager, the ILNG supported 232 of 546 requests (42 percent). In 2009, the ILNG supported 295 of 363 requests (81 percent). The Public Affairs Office received approximately 200 fewer requests in 2009 because communities knew a lot of their National Guard units were deployed. In 2010, the ILNG supported 512 of 622 requests (82 percent). In 2011, the ILNG supported 665 of 766 requests (87 percent). The statistics could have been much higher, but lack of funding for the 144<sup>th</sup> Army Band and availability of aviation assets because of deployments and/or BRAC realignment created several requests the Illinois National Guard was unable to support. Of the 101 requests that could not be supported, 26 of them were for the 144<sup>th</sup> Army Band and nine were aviation related. That means 35 percent of the non-supported requests fell into one of those two categories.

Chrisman provides superior customer service and has a firm grasp of the military's community relations regulations. He tries to find a way to say "yes" to requests for support. If the assets are not available or the request cannot be supported by regulation, Chrisman provides the requestor with contact information for their local VFW or American Legion, which continued to show positive support in our communities through our veteran organizations. This has also helped the Illinois National Guard build positive relations with these veterans organizations.

Having worked community relations requests for four years, Chrisman has developed a lot of relationships that have helped him get support for an event, even when the answer from the brigades and wings are no. Full-time personnel at FMS shops in North Riverside, Springfield and Marseilles assisted with vehicle support for short suspense events. Recruiters and other full-time Soldiers supported

speaking events or vehicle static displays when it appeared the Illinois National Guard was unable to support an event.

Since taking over the program in 2008, Chrisman improved the Speakers Bureau program, created a new database that allows units to view upcoming community relations events, increased the support from the Illinois Air National Guard that ultimately made the program more joint, improved relationships between PAO and MACOMs, revised the internal community relations regulations and created a program that is one of the best in the nation.

After revitalizing the Speakers Bureau program in 2009, it was also Chrisman's personal goal to support 95 percent of all speaker-related requests and have ILNG speakers at each key event throughout the year. For every key event such as the anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the anniversary of Operation Enduring Freedom, Patriots Day, Memorial Day and Veterans Day, Chrisman got speakers engaged in community events throughout the state. He also coordinated support for 98 percent of all speaker requests. This includes 13 speakers for Memorial Day events and 67 speakers for Veterans Day events.

The overall objective of the JFHQ-IL PAO community relations program is to make the ILNG more visible in the community and to highlight the ILNG to the citizens. By updating the Speakers Bureau program in 2009 and marketing well-spoken Soldiers and Airmen to the community, JFHQ-IL PAO accomplished that goal. In 2011, the ILNG supported a total of 194 speaker requests throughout the state. Speakers were engaged in activities from school events and celebrations to supporting Chicago Memorial Day and more than 130 Veterans Day activities. Not only did Chrisman market the ILNG to the community, but he also brought together the Army and Air Guard assets as one team.

During 2011, the Illinois National Guard's Public Affairs Program, with the help of Mr. Mike Chrisman, has gone above and beyond to reinforce the relations between the community and the ILNG. Through more effective outreach, Chrisman has helped build positive relationships with the community and helped strengthen a 375-year relationship between the Illinois National Guard and the communities we serve.



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Dear National Guard Bureau:

In the attached packet you will see some statistics that tell the story of the Illinois National Guard Community Relations Program and the great strides it has made by the increase of received and supported requests. In 2008 the program supported only 46 percent of the requests. In 2009, JFHQ-IL PAO supported 81 percent of the 363 requests. In 2010, it supported 512 of 622 requests (82 percent). In 2011, 87 percent of the 766 requests were supported with community support provided for 665 events.

Mike Chrisman, Community Relations Manager for JFHQ-IL PAO, strengthened the program during 2011 and made it one of the best in the nation – perhaps the best. His dedication to community outreach and support for community relations activities has been remarkable. He has also made it a personal goal to involve the Illinois Air National Guard and make the program more of a joint venture.

There may be times when requests are denied because of regulations governing the use of military assets or simply the lack of funding or assets. However, when Mike could, he found a way to “yes.” In the last year, we supported almost 200 speaker requests with well-spoken Soldiers and Airmen in community who talked about the great things the Illinois National Guard is doing. During Veterans Day alone, Illinois Guard members spoke at 67 events. During Memorial Day, an additional 13 speakers were engaged in community events.

In building our community relations program, we have also built strong relationships with key partners in Illinois including the USO, the Army’s Office of Chief of Public Affairs – Midwest, the Pritzker Military Library, the City of Chicago, the Illinois Governor’s Office and both the state and federal Veterans Affairs – to name just a few.

Mike Chrisman is responsible for these major accomplishments during 2011. His tireless efforts and desire to be successful have reinforced an already strong bond between the Illinois National Guard and its communities.

As you can tell, I am very proud of the program and our community relations manager and hope you will give him strong consideration for the Keith L. Ware community relations award-individual achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bradford E. Leighton".

BRADFORD E. LEIGHTON  
Major, LG, ILARNG  
Public Affairs Director