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Contact: Kati Elliott
KEH Communications
410-975-9638
kati@kehcomm.com

Secure Online Communications Portal Connects Traveling Family Members with Their Loved Ones at Home

Connect And Join provides online and offline resources for reducing the stress of separation for deployed military and other travelers

COLUMBIA, S.C., May 19, 2006 – Connect And Join, a family support and education services publishing company, has created a new secure online communications portal designed to keep family members who are away, whether they are deployed military personnel, salespersons, or individuals on assignment, and their families emotionally connected during their separation. Connect And Join (www.connectandjoin.com), a subscription-based family website community, allows for private, frequent and meaningful interactions between the traveling family member and family members at home, including messaging and calendaring, online scrapbooking and event archiving, and computer-based arts and crafts projects.

“Families who have a father or mother away from home for long periods of time have unique stress-related characteristics, both during separation and reunion,” said Linda Dennis, founder and publisher of Connect And Join. “Our company has its foundation in education and military and we have used our knowledge and skills in this area to create the web site and other resources that help families stay connected while offering educational technology skill development for children.”

Families can build their own websites using templates and forms recreating “Life at Home,” or their own family message center. With each registration there are 5 users, with a Family Editor to oversee all content.

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They can include photos and other scanned images, daily newsletters and even post each day's events in a calendar system so that the traveler is kept up to date with everyday occurrences. Connect And Join's version 2 release will contain an area for children to keep a "Day's While You Were Away" journal, as well as share books that they are reading and artwork with the traveling parent. The portal also has a section for teens and a Make it and Mail™ section with projects that users can make and send to the family member who is away.

Families can use Connect And Join's archival capabilities to save online content, then print and convert key items into a journal or print scrapbook. They can also transfer content to a CD for a digital scrapbook.

According to Dennis, "All of our training uses project-based learning, and the help files, lesson plans and projects are aligned with the National Educational Technology Standards. So while children keep in contact with their parent who, often times is overseas, they are also learning skills that they can apply in the classroom."

Connect And Join will also publish a quarterly magazine and distribute it free of charge to annual portal subscribers. Within the publication, users will find thematic units, projects and resource information that assist them in using the Connect And Join portal, as well as columns from program participants such as Fred Medway, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of South Carolina and consultant to Connect And Join.

Connect And Join, the system, contains a training program, designed for computer users at all skill levels and available in the portal's help files and downloadable print directions. Version 2 Release allows the users digital video and audio step-by-step instructions. The Connect And Join program also offers a live help desk open eight hours each day and 24-hour e-mail assistance daily.

Dennis developed Connect And Join after she viewed "A Tour of Duty: Kosovo," a presentation by Colonel James Lockemy of the South Carolina National Guard, now a retired Brigadier General.

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The presentation included slides of long lines of soldiers waiting to check e-mail, only to be frequently frustrated by problems with attachments. "Colonel Lockemy explained that news from home is a great morale booster, but there are so many complications with e-mail that it becomes a frustrating experience," said Dennis. She herself experienced the trauma of family separation firsthand during her husband's deployments when he was a member of the United States Air Force.

The portal is designed to meet the federal Operational Security Guidelines (OPSEC). Each user of the portal signs a user agreement that requires that all security guidelines be met as well as a family code of ethics that addresses the use of pornography and profanity. The portal (www.connectandjoin.com) does not have any advertising or pop-up ads in the family areas, as well as no public viewing.

Connect And Join Strategic Partners include:

- Association of the United States Army (AUSA)
- The Bank of America - Military Bank

Connect And Join is also a proud team member of America Supports You.

About Connect And Join

Connect And Join is a family support and education services publishing company that produces a series of multimedia products, primarily a Web-based subscription communication portal that enables separated families to stay in touch. Connect And Join was developed by publisher Linda Dennis after viewing *A Tour of Duty: Kosovo*, a personal account presented by Colonel James Lockemy of the South Carolina National Guard. With volunteer support from the professional and educational community, Connect And Join has completed a successful pilot and interviews with military families in the development of the portal. For more information, visit <http://www.connectandjoin.com>.

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