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Marines Get ‘Back In The Saddle’

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Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany, GA — Marines stationed at Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany and its various tenant commands met in the Base Theater here, Jan. 11, to get ‘back-in-the-saddle’ and prepare for the upcoming year. The training covered a wide-range of topics, from sexual assault to prescription drug abuse, among others. “It is important that we take the time coming back from the holidays to re-focus our attention on all the aspects of personal safety,” Sgt. Maj. Conrad Potts, sergeant major, MCLB Albany, said. “A lot of times we go home and forget the attention to details about staying safe in the work place. This is just a way to get them back into the right frame of mind,” he added.

Kelly Narowski, a public speaker dedicated to educating others on the dangers of unsafe decision making, was also on hand to share statistical data and personal experiences that may dissuade others from making snap, unsafe choices behind the wheel. Narowski used videos, researched facts and personal testimony centered on an overall theme - vehicle accidents are not really accidents at all because they stem from personal choices people make and, therefore, can be avoided. “Approximately 33,000 people died in car crashes in the U.S. in one year,” Narowski said. “This is enough to fill Oakland Stadium (in California). “If someone in Al Qaeda or the Taliban bombed this stadium it would be a national tragedy beyond what words could describe,” she added. “But no one looks at this like a tragedy although this is what it is.” Narowski said Americans are complacent regarding vehicle crashes. “They say ‘aw, accidents happen, they’re a part of life,’” she said. “However, you will never hear me use the word accident when I talk about car crashes. “The word accident implies no one is at fault. Crashes are due to human error such as drinking and driving, speeding, texting and driving, and driving when you’re too tired,” she said.

Narowski’s presentation not only differentiates between car crashes and car accidents, she recounted her own incident 13 years ago. “At the age of 25 I became permanently paralyzed from the chest down due to stupid choices on the road,” she said as she navigated the aisles of the Base Theater in her wheel chair. “I’m here to urge you to not learn this lesson the hard way and to take the job of driving very seriously.” The presentation also focused on brain and spinal cord injuries as these organs cannot be fixed by physicians. “If you damage your brain or your

spinal cord you're talking permanent disability and most of time you're talking permanent and severe disability. The number one cause of traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury is car crashes," Narowski said. "It (TBI) is going to change how people perceive you and how you act. "It (brain) is responsible for memory, motor function, initiation, impulse control, problem solving, language, social function and dozens of other things," she added. Although Narowski shared her personal experience, she is quick to add that this presentation is not solely about her personal story or sympathy for her condition, but the research and testimonies she has spent years collecting. She also shared the stories of celebrities such as pop singer Lisa Lopez and pro-athlete Derek Thomas, among others, how their mistakes led to death or a disability. However, not all of the celebrities Narowski mentioned were at fault for their injuries or death.

Christopher Reeves, most notable for his role as Superman on the big screen, became a quadriplegic after a horse-riding accident. The anecdote illustrated the life-altering effects of complete paralysis. "He (Christopher Reeves) was a multimillionaire, but that means nothing when you can't move anything," she said. The sound of shifting seats could be heard as the audience watched videos depicting the horrible consequences associated with poor choices behind the wheel, whether it was someone sharing the loss of a loved one or footage of actual crashes. Some even turned away as they heard children cry for their parents and saw slow motion videos depicting the moment of impact between an unbuckled driver and the windshield. The key point is all of this can be prevented, according to Narowski. It is not just about the quick decisions made in the moment; lifestyle decisions also play a significant role, she added.

"Hopefully you engineer your life in a way that you avoid toxic people and you surround yourself with high quality people," she said. "We also have to take care of ourselves by eating right, exercising right and practicing stress management. Personal safety is a part of that; under the proverbial umbrella of taking care of yourself." Lance Cpl. Jacob Kennedy, administrative specialist, Military Personnel Center, MCLB Albany, reflected on what he saw and heard. "As I was watching the video I was thinking about what if that was my kid and how I would react to it and how others would react to it as well," Kennedy said. "Certain presentations made more of an impact than others; I'm glad Ms. Kelly Narowski could speak to the Marines and open our eyes on driving awareness." Additional briefs from base personnel included sexually transmitted diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus, syphilis and herpes from the Naval Branch Health Clinic, and sexual harassment and assault from MCLB Albany's Marine Corps Police Department officers.