**NAVAIR petty officer wins Headquarters Sailor of the Year**

By Jacqueline Millham

NAVAIR HQ Against nominees from Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers in Maryland, Petty Officer First Class Daniel Eldridge, an aviation technician serving as NAVAIR Technical Directive Kit Manager, was recognized for coordinating seven Central Kitting Activity employees as they processed, issued, tracked more than 4,800 Technical Directive (TD) Kits valued at approximately $122 million. Eldridge also increased the compliance rate of technical directives to 87 percent and decreased TD processing time by 25 percent.

Eldridge will advance to represent NAVAIR HQ against nominees from Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Headquarters Senior Sailor of the Year Nominees from Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers in January for the command’s overall 2018 Sailor of the Year award.

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Staff Commanding Officer Capt. Jason Goff, who presented the award for Headquarters, said a Junior Sailor can have as much impact on fleet readiness as a program manager.

"Your accomplishments caught my eye because they placed capabilities directly to the fleet," Goff said.

"That’s speed to the fleet and is directly attributed to the work you did," he added. "Senior leadership relies on first class petty officers like you to get the work done."

The Southern Maryland Mustang Association also recognized Eldridge at the ceremony, presenting him with a letter of congratulations and a miniature replica of the United States Navy Memorial Lone Sailor sculpture in Washington, D.C.

Harry Errington, historian for the Southern Maryland Mustang Association who represented the organization at the event, said Eldridge can count himself among the many people on base in the same situation and we wanted to create a safe and confidential environment where they can come talk to us, hear our stories and tell theirs, and maybe get some feedback about what others are doing, how they’re handling it, what might have worked, or what didn’t work."

Engle embraced the idea, agreeing to be the group’s meeting facilitator and taking it upon himself to complete a few months of civilian online training.

“I wanted to do the training so I had an understanding of what the friends and family of those struggling with any sort of addiction are going through so I can best serve them,” Engle said.

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**Pax River support group assists family, friends of addicts**

By Donna Cipolloni

NAS Patuxent River Public Affairs

The number of drug- and alcohol-related deaths occurring in Maryland increased in 2017 for the seventh year in a row, reaching an all-time high of 2,282 deaths, according to the Maryland Department of Health. Of those intoxication deaths, 88 percent were opioid related. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control reports that 91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.

Two Sailors aboard NAS Patuxent River – Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Grace Beyer and Hospitalman Baylee Williams – have firsthand knowledge of the devastation the opioid epidemic can wreak, not only on those addicted, but on the lives of the family and friends around them.

With that in mind, and with the assistance of Pax River Chaplain Lt. Tristan Engle, the two women have formed a group they hope will offer people peer support, a safe place to vent their frustrations, and the knowledge that they aren’t alone.

“It all started about a year ago when I was going through some things with [a family member], who is a recovering drug addict,” Williams explained. “It was a really bad time. They’d been living on the streets in New Jersey and were MIA for a while. I had posted a flier on Facebook and HM3 Beyer saw it and reached out to me. She told me I wasn’t alone, that she was going through a similar situation, and was available if I ever needed anyone to talk to.”

Beyer recognized Williams’ struggle. “She too was dealing with an addicted loved one and had lived through the traumatic experience of having to save them when they were overdosing. I had realized that when I reached out to my command, no one really knew how to talk to me about it because they hadn’t been through something like that,” Beyer said. “When I saw Williams’ posts, I was so comforted and just had to reach out to her. We talked for months and she was there for me through some pretty tough times.”

In each other, the Sailors had finally found someone they could relate to and talk with in an intimate and nonjudgmental way. Realizing that they can’t be the only two on base dealing with the situation, they attempted to find a support group at Pax River, but found one did not exist so they decided to start one.

“We reached out to Chaplain Engle and he offered to be our mentor in order to get it going,” Williams noted. “There are probably many people on base in the same situation and we wanted to create a safe and confidential environment where they can come talk to us, hear our stories and tell theirs, and maybe get some feedback about what others are doing, how they’re handling it, what might have worked, or what didn’t work. We’re not alone, it’s a team fight.”

Engle embraced the idea, agreeing to be the group’s meeting facilitator and taking it upon himself to complete a few months of civilian online training.

“I wanted to do the training so I had an understanding of what the friends and family of those struggling with any sort of addiction are going through so I can best serve them,” Engle said.