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Univ. camp addresses parents' deployment

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FOR THE RED & BLACK

Some campers will have a chance to bond over more than s'mores and skinned knees this summer.

The University Extension Service will provide a camp for children of reservists deployed in recent military

Operation 4-H Joint Forces at the Falls will be held at the Wahsega 4-H Center near Dahlonega.

The weeklong camp is for kids ages 13 to 15 who have a parent that is deployed, will be deployed or has recently returned from deployment, said Mandy Marable, the University Extension 4-H Specialist.

In addition to normal camp activities such as tubing, high-ropes and hiking, children will participate in two classes to help them adjust to problems caused by sudden deployment, said Sharon Gibson, state coordinator of Children, Youth and Family Risk.

Children of deployed

service members may face problems such as anxiety, new family responsibilities, financial changes and lacking someone to relate to, she said.

As a result, the children can become depressed, angry and unable to focus in school, she said.

Gibson is helping to develop materials to be used in the camp's two classes.

One class will teach the children how to cope with the hardships. The other class will teach them how to explain their experiences to people who may not relate.

Children can feel a link to the missing parent by sacrificing for their community, just as their parents are sacrificing for their country, Gibson said.

Another benefit for children at the camp is the chance to develop camaraderie with other children who can understand their situation, she said.

One University staff member knows the burden of sudden military deployment well. Rebecca Thomas works

for the University Extension Service.

Her husband Leslie is a sniper in the Army. He has been serving in Iraq since January.

The couple has six children ages 5 to 19. Since Leslie was deployed, the children have had to take on more responsibilities and are experiencing anxiety.

Their teachers and peers don't understand what they are going through. Also, their father is not there to have fun with them anymore, she said.

On the day their dad left, the Thomas' youngest son was so upset he had to be picked up from school.

"He cried and cried and cried," Thomas said.

Operation 4-H Joint Forces at the Falls is designed to help children to cope with this kind of trauma.

The camp will be held July 11-15 and costs \$25 per child.

The camp can accommodate up to 120 participants. Reservations can be made by calling the University Extension Service at 542-4444.