

# Rolling Out the Red Carpet

Last Modified on 12/04/2019 6:38 pm EST

By Grace Marvin



In South Georgia, a program dedicated to making service men and women feel at home, has rolled out the red carpet to welcome Moody Air Force Base personnel for a half century.

“The purpose of our Red Carpet dinners is to welcome the airman and their families to our community. To let them know we are glad that they are here,” said Ty O’Steen, the current chairman of Red Carpet of South Georgia (RCSG).

RCSG is the force behind planning the three to four Red Carpet welcome dinners a year that provide an opportunity for Moody personnel and community members to get to know each other. RCSG began as a subcommittee of the Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce’s Military Affairs Committee. The first welcome dinner was in 1965, and not much about the dinners has changed in 53 years.

“We have a 50/50 split of military personnel and community,” O’Steen said. “The community folks that attend the dinners range from sponsors to city and county representatives. The community members appreciate the chance to meet the airmen and to hear their stories.”

Every Red Carpet dinner is held at Ocean Pines Clubhouse and features a menu of southern fare staples, including Swamp Salad, a memorable crowd-pleaser.

“Swamp Salad is a great association for anyone who has ever been to Moody or a Red Carpet Dinner,” said Lucy Greene, a Valdosta resident who has been involved with Red Carpet dinners since 1970. “Former Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters came to a party several years ago and he still asks about it whenever we hear from him.”

O’Steen said the community’s welcoming nature goes back to its roots as an agricultural town.

“Back when there were family farms, you’d help your neighbor. A neighbor helped bring in your crops, and you helped them bring in theirs. That type of mentality still permeates today,” O’Steen said. “It’s more than Southern hospitality. It’s in our DNA because Moody has been in our life for decades.”

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