



## 2023 Military Citizen of the Year

*Ssgt. Kristina Craven*

Kristina has dedicated hours upon hours to revamp the Military Working Dog program at Shaw AFB. She maintains and trains 6 handlers and 6 Military Working Dogs. These MWDs specialize in support of Explosive Detection and Narcotic Detection for the safety of the Town of Sumter and Shaw Air Force Base. Kristina has been sought out personally by United States Secret Service to provide Security for 10 missions this year, including the support of President Biden, First Lady, Vice-President Harris, Secretary of Defense, and former President Carter. In just this year, she has performed over 56 demonstrations for local schools in Sumter, Columbia, and non-profit career path programs for teens preparing to graduate. Recently, she spoke at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for a local program opening a youth gym that will allow children and teens a safe place to go. She was discovered by Chamber of Commerce as a speaker for future events by her positive energy and natural ability to captivate an audience.

Kristina is actively involved around the Sumter community, on and off base. She volunteered 240 hours of her off duty time as the Head Coach for the Thomas Sumter Academy girls' basketball team. Here, she leads a group of 12 young ladies in skills, determination, and mentorship. She also volunteered as Coach for a boys AAU Sumter Splash basketball team at North Hope Center. In the last year alone, Kristina organized and coordinated the first ever Commander's Cup which had 15 events across the installation, even building a homemade obstacle course concluding with over 800 participants! She has also been an active member in her Squadron's private organization. She partnered with her teammates and put together a Halloween Party--including a haunted house--and Squadron Holiday Party. These events brought together over 200 participants. Kristina is also continuously sought after to be the emcee of Wing level Awards and was recently awarded as NCO of the Quarter for her work ethic as the decorator, script author and MC for 275 guests and honorary Commanders of Sumter for Annual Awards Banquet

Recently, Kristina received training for the Peer Support Program. This program certifies and recognizes Kristina by a colored patch she wears on her uniform. This is so she is easily identifiable by any military member that may need to talk to someone for crisis, mentorship, or guidance. This is so important for many military members who may be far from home and don't have a support system in place to get help. This training also translates into her coaching abilities when with the young teens of Sumter. Kristina can use those concepts learned to help guide them through any troubles they may be having with bullies, or other personal life problems.

Kristina also believes in supporting women in the workplace and empowering each other. It has been evident while seeing her work that she attempts to build strong teams and encouragement to other women in a male dominated career field. In 2019, Kristina organized the 70th Anniversary of the Women in the Air Force (WAF) luncheon--centering around Women's History Month. The WAF are the women who paved the way for women's equality in the Air Force, and without them, we would not be where we are today in service. Kristina was able to contact a member of the WAF and coordinated her transportation to San Antonio to share her stories and showcase the uniforms worn through United States Air Force history. Her achievements gained her awards by Major General Susan L. Pamerleau for the event. Kristina has been elected as an official with the Air Force Sergeants Association, Chapter 337 for the 2023 year. Her personal motivation to become a part of this Chapter is to influence younger generations of women in the Air Force and plans to use this association as an outlet to create events built around bringing women and communities together.

She has dedicated time and built teams to conduct large ground maintenance clean-up of debris and shrubbery; including coordination of the recycling and hauling of all materials removed. By doing this, she was able to finalize up a fitness area project for all 249 members of the Security Forces Squadron to utilize for physical training. This clean-up project earned the squadron \$15,000 for innovation and maintenance to improve other areas for our Defenders. Additionally, Kristina identified a system deficiency that affected all Department of Defense K9 handlers. These issues were resolved as a direct result of Kristina's diligence in her profession and improved the quality of life for 540 military working dogs.

Kristina has been given accolades from various leaders through the military and community. In December she was provided a letter from Oakland Primary's school counselor thanking her for her willingness to showcase productive and rewarding future career choices to their students and in August 2022, she received a Certificate of Appreciation for supporting a successful Back to School Bash from the Army Central Headquarters. She was coined by the Wing Commander for her hard work to the Commander's Cup and, she recently was coined by the Security Forces Career Field Manager for her hard work and dedication to her performance on and off duty. Of course, nothing can out do the admiration and smiles she receives from her team of young ladies on the Thomas Sumter girls' basketball team.