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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Fort Leonard Wood singers win back-to-back vocal competitions

**FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo.** – Staff Sergeant Michael Joseph, a drummer in the 399<sup>th</sup> Army Band stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, won the Army’s 2014 Operation Rising Star Singing contest Friday, held at the historic Fort Sam Houston Theatre.

The 2013 Rising Star, Sgt. Christiana Ball, is a drill sergeant also stationed at Fort Leonard Wood. Ironically, Joseph sang “Something in the Water” by Carrie Underwood as his victory song immediately after being named the 2014 winner.

The real secret for both winners, according to competition organizers, was how they rallied friends, family members and the Fort Leonard Wood community to vote for them online. Joseph acknowledged that immediately after being named the winner by thanking all of the “friends, family and battle buddies who voted for me.”

As the 2014 Rising Star, Joseph won an all-expenses-paid trip to record a 3-song music demo at a professional recording studio. (The location of the professional recording studio experience will be selected based on genre of music that will be recorded.) The trip will include airfare, lodging, three days of studio time and \$1,000 spending cash. The studio time includes music arrangement, mixing, mastering, a vocal coach, use of four studio musicians for one day, an audio engineer, and a producer. Approximate retail value of the grand prize is \$18,700.

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Family member Celeste Betton, whose husband is stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, won second place and a cash prize of \$1,000.

Third place was Air Force Tech Sgt. Robert Carter, from Joint Base San Antonio, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. He won a cash prize of \$500.

Other finalists were Private Anthony Elliot from the Presidio of Monterey, Calif., Family member Jackie Gollihar, whose husband is stationed at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, and Spc. Johnny Vargas from Fort Benning, Georgia.

“...but you’re all winners,” said guest judge Debra Byrd, former vocal coach for American Idol and current vocal coach for NBC’s “The Voice.”

Byrd was not just speaking metaphorically.

All six finalists were flown to Army Entertainment’s rehearsal theater on the Installation Management Command complex at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to spend two full weeks receiving vocal coaching and help with their costumes, moves, and stage presence from Army Entertainment production staff and former winners and finalists from the competition.

Joseph summed up how valuable the “Rising Star” experience has already been to him shortly after being announced the 2014 winner.

“I’m so thankful to be here with all of these great vocalists,” he said. “I’ve learned so much from everybody, from the judges, from you Sergeant Major [Tilley].”

“I’ve grown so much as a person and as a Soldier in the last two weeks, and this just means everything to me,” he said.

In celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the competition, previous years’ “all stars” returned to the stage to mentor current finalists and illustrate how taking part in the competition changed their lives.

Guest judge and country music star Michael Peterson reminded all six finalists that win or lose, the competition has already opened doors for them.

“The previous champions who are here are evidence that this is not the finish line,” Peterson said. “This is the starting line for what’s next.”

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For more information, contact the Fort Leonard Wood Public Affairs Office at 573.563.4145.

*(This article is from U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation.)*

## *About Fort Leonard Wood*

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*Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains more than 80,000 military and civilians each year.*

*Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command's U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, one of only five reception stations in the Army, and the Army's largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.*

*Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a large Forces Command unit that is responsible for all deployable capabilities at Fort Leonard Wood. A colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.*

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