By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

With her son now graduated from West Point, Tammy Sutherland-Abbott will now be using her experience as a military mom in a new capacity for the Army's most premier post.

Sutherland-Abbott recently received a call from Kansas Senator Jerry Moran's office asking her if she would like to serve on a candidate selection board for cadets in the Sunflower State.

Each U.S. senator and representative in all 50 states have a given number of cadets they can recommend for a military academy, and this is where Sutherland-Abbott's new position comes into play.

"However many graduated, that's how many they can pick to replace," she said. "That's for all academies. If two graduate from West Point from Kansas, you can put two new ones in."

Understandably, Sutherland-Abbott was excited about the call from Moran's office.

"I feel very honored to be considered, let alone asked," she said.

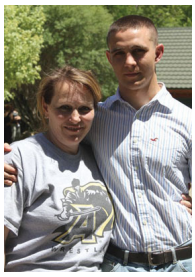
The selection board for Kansas is made up of as many as five committees who interview

candidates over one day. This year's interviews will take place in Abilene.

Sutherland-Abbott said when her son, Tyler Sutherland, was interviewed, those took place in Hutchinson. She said about 20 adults total serve on the committees.

Sutherland-Abbott said at this point, she is unsure of her other responsibilities for the position.

"I actually don't know other than interviewing cadets," she said. "I asked them if they had questions that we were supposed to ask. They said based on our own experiences with the academy to provide our own questions. The young lady that I spoke with said specifically that since I was a parent and we just went through all of it, I would have a real good indication of what I needed to ask."



Sutherland-Abbott has already met another of the adults serving on the board.

"Another mom, Jill McCarthy, her son was a grade ahead of Tyler," she said. "We knew them while Tyler wrestled through high school. He actually went to West Point. They live in Overland Park. She was always kind of a mentor for me. Being a year ahead, she experienced everything just before I had to. Her son graduated just before Tyler. She also serves on it. I look forward to sharing the experience with Jill."

Sutherland-Abbott said serving on the board is a great responsibility.

“Some students that think they’re wanting to go to the academy, really, it’s not a fit for them,” she said. “It is a great honor to even get this far that each child has desired to make this commitment. It truly is not just four years of college. It’s five years active duty plus three or more in reserves. It’s quite a commitment for these students to want to interview for.”

Sutherland-Abbott will begin serving on the selection board over the Oct.4-5 weekend.

“The students have to submit applications to the senator by a certain date,” she said. “They’re forwarded to us for review before the date of the actual interview process.”

Having gone through the interview process with her son, Sutherland-Abbott gave some insight on what qualities a candidate should have.

“They don’t look for someone who excels just strictly in academics,” she said. “West Point looks for what defines a true leader. How involved you’ve been in activities in school, your physical fitness level and also your academics all make the combination of the package. It’s not just the academics. Your military career pulls from all of those. What they are doing is truly developing leaders.”