

The Fayetteville Observer

Q&A with Lesley Backus

Published on Sunday, March 15, 2009

Lesley Backus is director of the Army's Army, a local volunteer organization that supports the military.

Name: Lesley Backus

Title: Director of the Army's Army

Age: 26

Home: Durham

In the news because: Backus is the new director of the Army's Army, a local volunteer organization started last year to support the military.

Lesley Backus had been strategic director at The Republik, a Durham advertising agency, before signing a one-year contract with the Army's Army.

Backus recently spoke with staff writer John Ramsey. Here are excerpts:

Q: What work and life experience do you bring to this job?

A: I've been working in marketing strategy for about three years now. And I basically have been putting together a comprehensive plan for clients to bring their brands to life. I bring a strategy background to the Army's Army. I also have been heavily involved in the community in Durham, and my entire life I've been involved in community organization.

Q: How many volunteers have signed up for this cause?

A: We have 900 volunteers currently. We have individuals as well as businesses who have pledged their partnership as well. I feel like we have a healthy volunteer base. This community is so supportive of the military. Considering the short time that we've been around, I think 900 is very healthy.

Q: How many people have been helped, and how?

A: I don't know if you can put a specific number on it. I think that it's one of those intangible things. There is a large group of people that are ready and happy and willing

to help you. We'll be adding capability to make a request to the Army's Army on the Web site. You can look at specific things and say maybe we made this person's day when they received a thank you card. It's knowing that people are out there for you.

Q: How has this helped your average enlisted soldier?

A: I think right now there hasn't been a lot of visibility. One of the things I've been working on is making our presence known on Fort Bragg. Once we have some of our capabilities in line, I think we'll have more of a direct impact. I think since the organization is new, they were excited to reach out and volunteer. Right now we're already reaching out to our volunteers. We're working on partnerships with Bragg to make the Army's Army more visible within a couple of months.

Q: Do you have any military connection?

A: I grew up in a military family. My dad was in the Air Force. The military has been a part of my entire life. I think the demands, the expectations, the needs, are very real to me. I think I understand. I haven't been in the service myself, but coming from a family, to have someone from your family who may be deployed, it takes its strain both on the family and also on the service person. I think it gives me a perspective on what our volunteers need to do to really help those individuals.

Q: Originally, this group was sold as a way to lure folks to Fayetteville who are moving to the region as part of the Base Realignment and Closure. What is the goal now?

A: The goal is to have an organization of volunteers who have pledged their assistance, friendship and support to the military. It's designed to help people who may be relocating through BRAC, as well as supporting our military who live here at Fort Bragg. It's basically to support anyone who's coming as well as anyone who's currently here. For individuals who are moving to the area either through BRAC or they're being stationed here, there's a site called Fayettevillewantsyou.com. Any questions they have, either about schools or places to live, we have an army of volunteers who can answer those questions. To show our support, we'll be doing some more activities and working with other organizations in the community.

Q: What will be your main goal over the next six months?

A: My main goal is to continue to mobilize the volunteers, finding ways they can get involved and identifying events and activities that we can lend our support. Make the Army's Army more visible. I think there are people who are looking to support the military and don't know there's an organization they can join. We're also going to be getting out there with local businesses ... so people can recognize businesses that support the military.

We're working on organizing several different events. We'll be doing some partnerships with Glory Days in May. We have some ideas we're working with. We have several things

we can do to support people who are deployed and we can help people living in our community now. In the past we've done things like thank you cards to our veterans who have served.

<http://www.fayobserver.com/article?id=321187>

