

The Fayetteville Observer

Salute to military expands to 31 days

Published on Saturday, April 25, 2009

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One weekend just isn't enough to experience Fayetteville's proud military heritage. So how about a whole month of festivals, concerts, parades, memorials and demonstrations?

That's the idea behind 31 Days of Glory, which Mayor Tony Chavonne kicked off Friday night. The month-long celebration will honor the troops, veterans and their families.

"I would encourage you to find those opportunities and get involved in our community," Chavonne said. "It is a very special time in our city."

The first event, a United We Stand Art Exhibition, started Friday with a reception at the AIT building, where Chavonne spoke. The exhibit runs through May 25. The next event is the Fort Bragg Fair, which runs Thursday through May 15.

The arranged festivities are intended to be an annual celebration each May. The idea is a spin-off of the Glory Days festival held each Memorial Day weekend by the Downtown Alliance.

"There should not be any place in America that is celebrating Memorial Day any larger than we do in Fayetteville," Chavonne said. "We think it's a logical extension to extend Glory Days to a whole month of activities."

Other events include a Golf for a Hero Tournament, an All-American Week Living History Encampment and a book signing by Jeff Falkel, who wrote "The Making of Our Warrior."

Fayetteville's pro-military attitude has increasingly garnered the spotlight in the past year. Volunteers calling themselves the Army's Army have sprung up and begun promoting the community as a "soldier's sanctuary." The national media wrote about Boots & Booties, a baby shower last November at the Crown Exposition Center for about 1,000 military moms.

And this May, Newsmax magazine is ranking Fayetteville among 25 U.S. cities that best express American values.

All of the renewed focus on the military is not a coincidence: thousands of additional soldiers, dependents and civilian Department of Defense workers are expected to move to the region by 2011 as part of base realignment.

Leaders with the Fayetteville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Museum of the Cape Fear Historical Complex helped organized 31 Days of Glory.

"It was a great collaboration of a lot of people to come together and present many patriotic events," said John Meroski, president of the visitors bureau.

He said his eventual goal is to expand the concept to cover the month of November, too, for Veterans Day.

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