



Military Affairs: World's First "Soldiers' Sanctuary"

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FAYETTEVILLE, NC - A North Carolina county has declared itself a "Soldiers' Sanctuary," and enlisted a citizen "Army's Army" to defend.

On September 5, in a statement of support for the nation's military men and women, Cumberland County, N.C. will declare itself the "World's First Sanctuary for Soldiers and Their Families," with major roads entering the county marked by official blue and white "Sanctuary" signage. Within the Sanctuary, soldiers will be eligible for local services ranging from free child care to job placement for soldiers' spouses. A public proclamation will be made by U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes at a "groundbreaking" ceremony at the Fayetteville Independent Light Infantry Armory and Museum in Downtown Fayetteville.

Defending the ethos of the newly established Sanctuary is a 500+ member "Army's Army" of community volunteers, pledged to "watch over those who watch over us," i.e. assist military families. Recruited via posters, video, brochures and the internet (www.armysarmy.com), citizens in this military support group will offer one-to-one services; member businesses will also offer discounts and preferential treatments.

In addition, pro-military badges and bumper stickers have been distributed to citizens, along with a contrasting motivational poster, showing anti-military news headlines (e.g. "Blast Damages Times Square Recruiting Station") from elsewhere around the nation. Also, a social networking website, www.Fayettevillewantsyou.com, has been created to help connect soldiers considering moving into the "Sanctuary Community" with one-on-one citizen guides, able to steer them through the relocation process.

Jim Konneker, commander of the Army's Army, says, "As the ultimate company town for the military, we truly believe our soldiers deserve to have a hometown that treats them like the heroes they truly are."

Mayor Anthony G. Chavonne says, "Around here we don't just give lip service to 'support the troops,' we live it every day."

The Soldiers' Sanctuary is spearheaded by the Cumberland County community leaders and the Army's Army. This year, due to federal BRAC, or Base Realignment and Closure, legislation, tens of thousands of military families will be required to move to one of the 11 North Carolina counties closest to Fort Bragg. Cumberland County seat Fayetteville declared itself the most patriotic city in America" (August 15, 2005).

CONTACT: elissa Rivera 919/956-9400 x 211 Rubberneck Media [Email Contact](#) Dan Barron 646/356-7651 Conroy Barron Public Relations [Email Contact](#)

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