

E'town native at heart of Fort Benning information fair

Soldiers, civilian employees learn about new duty post

By Amber Coulter

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Military members, civilians who work with the military and their families have plenty to think about when they make one of the many moves often associated with their careers.

Linda Brady, director of communications and outreach for the Greater Georgia Chamber of Commerce and The Valley Partnership, said she has fielded questions as large scale as housing options, school standards, job availability and quality of life. She also is asked about smaller details that are just as important to families, such as children's sports league, and churches.

Brady, who grew up in Elizabethtown, coordinated Thursday's information fair for those leaving for assignments at Fort Benning, Ga. Tank training programs long associated with the Armor Center at Fort Knox are relocating to the new Maneuver Center of Excellence as part of the Base Realignment and Closure initiative.

Representing the Greater Georgia Chamber of Commerce and The Valley Partnership, Brady stood in the doorway of the Fort Knox Leaders Club directing visitors to information about Fort Benning, Columbus, Ga., and the Chattahoochee Valley.

She smiled at attendees as they came in, held out her hand and said,

"They'll take care of you at Fort Benning, but outside the gate you're on your own. I am your concierge."

Brady distributed business cards and told attendees to contact her with questions and for services needed to make the transition easier or to integrate into a new community.

"You're part of our family now," she said.

Some families are skeptical about the move. Brady said she hopes to ease concerns by providing needed information and sharing what the region has to offer.

That's the situation for Donald and Michaela Howard of Radcliff, who are making the move after living in the Fort Knox area for 20 years.

Michaela, a purchasing agent, doesn't want to leave her home or job.

"You set yourself up in your own house," she said. "You own your home. You set it up the way you like it."

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Donald Howard works with the military in tanker weapons training, so the couple has to move. They went to the fair looking for information about employment possibilities for Michaela Howard, information about the area's housing market and a place to keep the couple's three horses.

More than 300 representatives set up booths at the information fair to introduce future residents to the area's businesses and services.

Cathy Williamson, manager of the Lincoln Trail Area branch of the Better Business Bureau, asked visitors to visit www.bbb.org to look up companies with which they plan to deal.

She said some soldiers are young and inexperienced at living on their own. That, coupled with their steady income, can lead shady companies and scam artists to take advantage of them.

Elizabethtown residents Leroy Hopwood and James Macht, civilian tank instructors, said civilians have their own challenges when making such moves. They have to figure out how to pay for starting anew and do it without some of the benefits and services available to military members. It's also hard to get an idea about aspects of new communities, such as high-crime areas to avoid, they said.



Elizabethtown residents James Macht and Leroy Hopwood, from left, hear Linda Brady tell them that she'll help them find any service they need during the move to Fort Benning and getting settled. The men said it's difficult to get to know an area well before moving, so it's important to get whatever information they can.



Ashlea Gill of Radcliff, left, and her 1-year-old son, Myles, are greeted at an information fair in Fort Knox by Linda Brady, director of communications and outreach for the Greater Georgia Chamber of Commerce and The Valley Partnership. Gill went to the fair to get information about schools to prepare for her family's upcoming move to Fort Benning, Ga