

Hospitality House offers soldiers Thanksgiving meal

BY ARTIE PHILLIPS

FORT HOOD HERALD

The Soldier Hospitality House opened its doors to roughly 50 soldiers and their families on Thanksgiving, giving those without family in the area a place to go for the holiday.

"The idea behind the house is to give these guys a place to go outside of the barracks," retired master sergeant and current resident of the Soldier Hospitality House Ben Bloker said. "Most of the guys that come here have been in the Army for a year or less and they can come be a part of a family atmosphere here."

Ben and his wife, Melody, are the current missionaries living at the house, along with their five children. The home was established by Cadence International as a place for soldiers to gather and experience friendship and camaraderie outside of the post atmosphere. The Blokers host weekly meals for soldiers in their home and frequently take trips outside of the home, as well.

"We average between 10 and 15 people here whenever we have people over; but the response today was overwhelming," Ben said. "We recruited at the reception barracks and some people told some of their friends, but this is still a huge turnout. But we are going to feed them all."



Soldiers prepare to eat a Thanksgiving meal Thursday at the Soldier Hospitality House on Chaparral Road in Killeen.

Many of the soldiers played games in the recreation room upstairs or sat at one of the dining tables and played cards. Others spent the hours leading up to the Thanks-

giving meal outside, riding dirt bikes around a track on the property.

One attendee, Pvt. Brandon Stewart, said one of the main draws for him was the

atmosphere.

"The reception barracks really aren't as bad as everyone says they are, but this place is really homey," he said. "I got to Fort Hood on Veterans Day and I heard about this place pretty soon. I came out soon after that, and now I've been to almost every event out here."

Other soldiers assisted Melody in the kitchen in preparing food for the Thanksgiving meal. Melody said she was thankful for the help, with roughly 50 people to feed.

"Usually I cook the meals on my own, because I enjoy cooking, but with so many people here it helps to have the extra hands," she said.

There were several volunteers associated with Cadence International helping out Thursday, too. Mark Fischer was in attendance with his wife and he said he had been a member of the organization since 1999.

"I like that the home is out here on the edge of town," Fischer said. "The country is nice out here and it has a lot of space."

Ben said he was grateful to see so many faces at the Thanksgiving meal, both new and returning.

"If we can give them a home from the job, that's what we want to do," he said.

The Soldier Hospitality House is located at 3981 Chaparral Road in Killeen. They can be contacted at 254-634-0822.

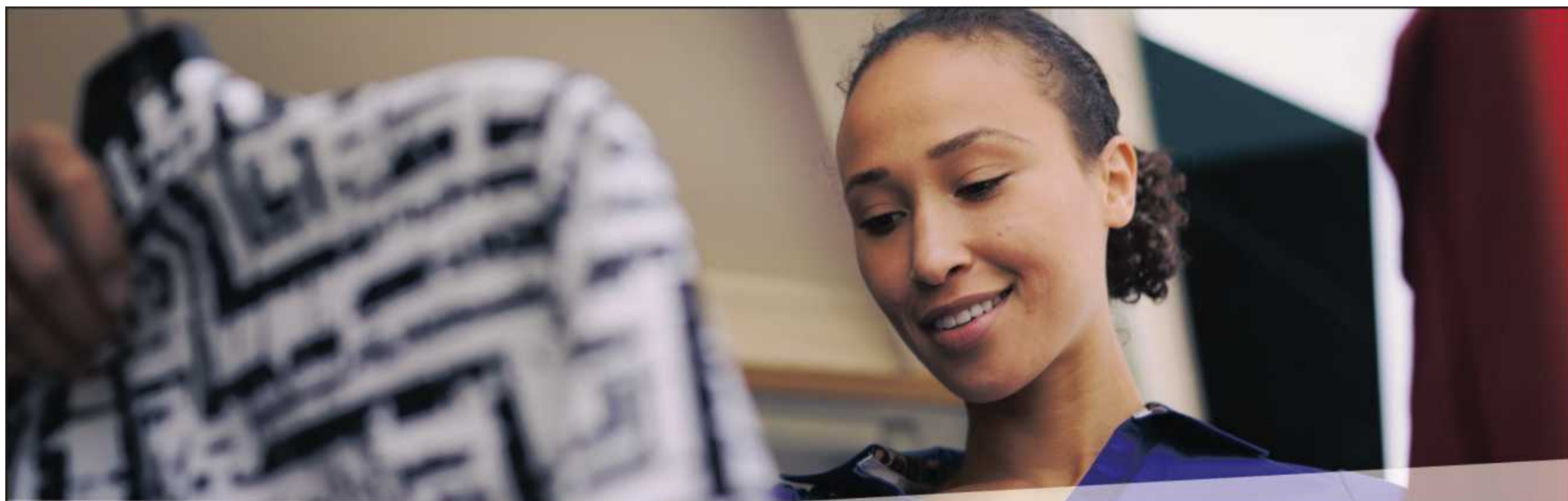
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Ben Bloker, director of the Soldier Hospitality House, prays with soldiers before enjoying a Thanksgiving meal Thursday at the Soldier Hospitality House on Chaparral Road in Killeen.



Soldiers relax and mingle Thursday at the Soldier Hospitality House on Chaparral Road in Killeen.



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