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1,000 Moms Attend Boots & Booties Military baby shower touches families

By Venita Jenkins

Staff writer

Sarah Deady walked into the Crown Expo Center on Saturday afternoon with her hospital bracelets still on her wrist and her 2-day-old daughter Ava in tow.

Deady had been released from the hospital less than an hour before Boots & Booties, the largest military baby shower, was set to start.

She had signed up for the baby shower months before and she didn't want to miss it.

Besides, her doctor told her it would be good for her to walk around.

"I figured that we would come on out and check and see what was going on," she said. "I think this is great. It is really exciting."

About 1,000 moms attended the event. Each received a gift bag filled with goodies for their newborns. The event was sponsored by Operation Homefront of North Carolina, Fayetteville Cares, Fort Bragg Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, and Pope Airman and Family Readiness Center.

Deady and her husband, Mark, were immediately surrounded by volunteers and sponsors who welcomed them and congratulated the couple on the newborn.

"It's good to see a lot of people coming out and helping the community and helping the moms out," Mark Deady said. "I am sure there are a few single moms out here who could use help."

This is the first time the organizations have hosted such an event. The shower was for pregnant women and mothers of babies up to six months old.

Within 24 hours of the posting of the event on Fayetteville Cares' Web site, 700 women applied to join the party. The event was booked within four days.

Jane Weaver-Sobel, North Carolina chapter president for Operation Homefront, said she met with Joanne Chavonne of Fayetteville Cares earlier this year about how to distribute more than 90 boxes of donated baby clothes. The community got behind the idea and donated more items to throw a shower, she said.

"We thought that it would go like hot cakes but it went much faster than we anticipated and we ended up with a waiting list," Weaver-Sobel said. "We want to take care of the military. These guys are overseas fighting for us."

A line snaked around the entrance of the Crown Expo before noon. The women were treated to a catered lunch of mini-sandwiches, deviled eggs, veggies and cup cakes. There were also drawings for prizes, including an iPod, computer, a complete baby suite, doula services, car seats and strollers and a brand new Chevy Malibu.

Melissa Sanchez drove away in the new car.

Along the wall of the Crown Expo were booths that provided expectant mothers with information about feeding, infant massages, infant care, labor and delivery and local resources available to them.

Vanessa McLaughlin-Iacovone, 22, sat at a table with other women in her company who are pregnant or have recently given birth. McLaughlin-Iacovone, who has been in the Army for three years, is due in December. She said the event helps those who may not have family in the area with their pregnancy.

"Certain people around here, all they know is their company because they are from other places," she said. "I am from here, so I have a support system. But for some of my friends, they only have us."

Contessa Vales, 23, is in McLaughlin-Iacovone's company. She is due Dec. 31.

The New York native said it was a great idea for the community to put on a baby shower for the women.

"I have never experienced a big gathering like this," Vales said. "For a lot of people, their family is not here because we are military. We only have our spouses and our coworkers. It is touching to me. This is my third baby shower, but it is good to experience it with other pregnant females."

The event gave the women the opportunity to interact with other expecting moms and gather tips, Vales said.

"I think this is a great experience and I will always remember this," she said.

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Staff photo by Octavio Jones

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