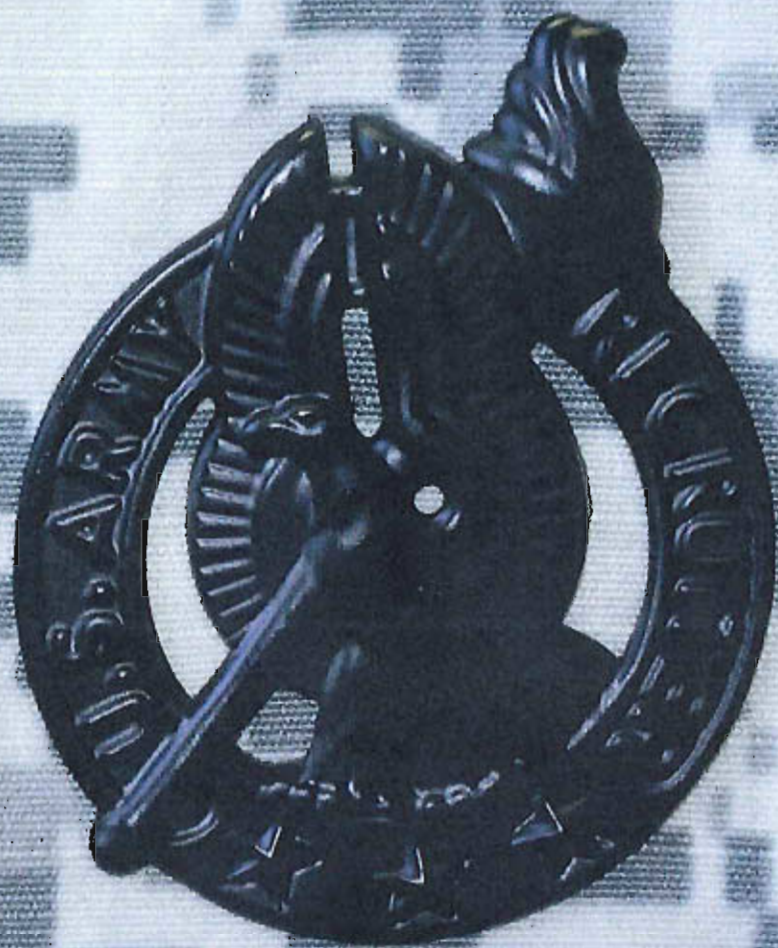


*"Strength  
Starts Here"*

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# Recruiter Journal



# 'Our Community Salutes' Expands to Mississippi

Story and photo by Jennifer Villaume  
Baton Rouge Battalion

The Jackson community recognized more than 150 graduating high school seniors enlisting in the armed forces upon graduation June 2.

Our Community Salutes (OCS) was designed to honor future members of the military outside their own high school graduation, honoring them in the community for their decision to serve.

"Typically graduations do not set aside or acknowledge the graduates that are choosing to serve," said Capt. LaTasha McCullar, company commander for the Jackson Recruiting Company. "With the help of OCS, we honor those graduates and give them support from the community they have pledged to defend."

"This venue affords the community to highlight their own, to draw attention to their future heroes and to establish military service as a viable option to our young men and woman," said Lt. Col. Jose Torres, Baton Rouge Battalion commander.

"Only one of four applicants qualify to enlist in our Army and the fact that young kids make a commitment to serve and wear our uniform — our symbol of strength; is something that must be loudly recognized," said Torres.

Juanita Sims-Doty, President and Executive Director of the International Community Ambassadors Network, served as the committee chair organizing the banquet for the seniors and parents.

"I feel that this inaugural recognition banquet has ignited a spirit of continued pride and support for our enlistees and their parents," said Doty.

The committee consisted of members of the community and representatives from each branch of the military. The committee volunteered by sending out invitations, organizing the program, packaging survival kits, and decorating for the event.

"As I shook the hands of the enlistees and their parents, I saw a 'spark' in their eyes that told me how much being recognized by their community meant to them as they go off to serve our country," said Doty. "I saw how proud the parents were of their children who had made this commitment. And I saw the community come together to show support and appreciation."

In addition to honoring the future enlistees, the ceremony honored the parents. A parent's oath of support was administered and a parent's prayer was read by parents, both written for the event by Carlyn Hicks of Jackson, Ms.

"It is important to honor parents and loved ones because these are the most influential people in that Future Soldier's life," said Hicks. "By embracing their family members, it sends a strong message that 'we get it' and makes it easier for familial support of our armed forces in the long run."

Hicks organized the survival kits for parents which consisted of items to remind them of the support they can give to their children when at basic training and beyond.

"With so much focus on the Soldiers, there is very little focus on the family members, mothers and fathers, who have to deal with the new adjustment of their son or daughter's decision to join the armed forces," said Hicks. "So, the survival kit was symbolism of, 'Hey parents, we know you are afraid and nervous, you aren't alone, here's how you can get through this tough time and make it better for your son or daughter during this transition.'"

In addition, the 2011 Gen. Colin L. Powell Service Award was presented to Emily Gibson, a high school guidance counselor at Neshoba Central High School for her support for high school students desiring service in all branches of the armed forces. She provides academic and career counseling and coordinates presentations and activities for military recruiters.

"The event offers everyone the opportunity to better our community, our Army and our Nation. I surely hope that it provides a vision for many of our youth, as well as their parents, to work towards achieving their goals in life, ultimately building a greater nation," said Torres.

*Our Community Salutes was created in 2009 by Dr. Kenneth Hartman who saw the need to honor seniors who chose a different path beyond college outside of their high school graduation service. Across the United States, local communities conduct banquets each year with coordination from local volunteers, civic organizations, active and retired military, high school educators and community leaders. For details, visit [www.ourcommunitysalutes.com/](http://www.ourcommunitysalutes.com/).*



Brandon Hall, a Future Soldier in the Jackson Recruiting Company, shakes hands with Lt. Col. Jose Torres during the Our Community Salutes ceremony in Jackson Ms. Hall is graduating from East Rankin Academy and enlisting as an Airborne Ranger Infantryman.