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Monday, December 24

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Ambler woman does her part to boost U.S. troops morale

Amanda Rittenhouse, Staff Writer
12/24/2007

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When Ambler resident, Florence Duckett began recording and sending inspirational messages to soldiers in 2004 she never dreamed it would land her in the Whitehouse with an opportunity to the president.

This month at a holiday reception in the east wing of the Whitehouse she met President and Mrs. Bush. Duckett, a licensed Baptist minister creates personalized compact discs with inspirational messages and sends them to soldiers serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and to United States troops all over the world. Duckett, who said she tries to be a weapon against low morale and depression also received a letter from President Bush in February thanking her for her efforts for the soldiers.

Duckett was amazed during the Whitehouse visit and said that there were decorated trees outside and inside every room. She said President and Mrs. Bush received all of the guests as they arrived and said she and other guests had free roam of the east wing of the Whitehouse.

"It would take all day just to look at what was in each room. I think the most unbelievable thing to me was the decorations, marble stairs and the beautiful string music. It was a feast for kings. I'm still on cloud nine. It was an honor and an opportunity to share this experience with the soldiers," she said. Duckett started recording CDs for the project four years ago in her home studio and has been in ministry for about 30 years. Duckett finds soldiers names to send care packages to from www.anysoldier.com.

Through her ministry project entitled Rose of Sharon Ministries Ltd. she has worked with nursing home residents and done street and prison ministry. Duckett has also volunteered for the USO at the Philadelphia airport and visits veteran hospitals to minister to patients. Duckett said she wants to go wherever have troops and hopes to minister to soldiers in Iraq in the future.

"Its not just a hobby it is a labor of love. I want to ensure that we will never forget about our soldiers," Duckett said.

Duckett was inspired to do the project after reading a letter from a soldier at the Church of Acts in Ambler.

Duckett's daughter Eboni Watkins, of Collingswood, New Jersey accompanied her to the Whitehouse reception. Together, Watkins and Duckett write inspirational gospel songs for and have recorded a few on the tracks for the soldiers. Watkins said that the decorations in the Whitehouse were beautifully ornate and enjoyed meeting President Bush.

"It was honor to meet him. He seemed very warm and a very humble down to earth man," she said. George Vogel, of Philadelphia served in Iraq with the Army National Guard for one year and two months between 2005 and 2006. Vogel, supervisor of the Amtrak call center in Northeast Philadelphia said Duckett and a group of employees put together a care package for him while he served that included one of her inspirational recordings.

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Vogel met Duckett for the first time upon his return to the United States. Duckett is a sales representative for Amtrak at a call center in Northeast Philadelphia. Vogel said he and other soldiers always appreciate letters and care packages.

"Letters are always a good avenue for support and a way to keep in touch with the way things are at home, he said.

Since November 2004, she sent over 500 packages to Iraq and Afghanistan. Duckett compiles the packages with her own funding and donations. Postage to send the packages is about \$4 to \$5 dollars, she said. In each package, Duckett sends out a letter, a Bible, CD player, inspirational CD, a scrapbook of her work and a copy of bush's letter to soldiers. The hour-long cds include eight songs, scripture, inspirational messages and jokes.

This holiday season, Duckett asks others to remember the soldiers serving away from their homes and families.

"They have taken an oath to serve our nation and we are blessed because we are here with our families. There are some soldiers who have had their first child born while they are gone. I do this so that they know that they are not forgotten and that they are important," Duckett said.

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