Press Release

Release Nr: 2004-06

April 14, 2020

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum spouse puts smiles in focus during pandemic

Fort Drum, NY - As a freelance photographer, Farrah Ramsey is used to putting smiles on people’s faces.

So, at a time when smiles seem in short supply during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, she took on the challenge of collecting them for families throughout the Fort Drum community.

This Easter weekend, Ramsey drove throughout the housing areas, photographing hundreds of families – from a safe distance, naturally – for the Front Porch Project.

Ramsey was inspired by a nationwide initiative where photographers have volunteered their talents to capture “front porch” family portraits during the COVID-19 outbreak, when most people are confined to their homes.

Early in April, Ramsey was scrolling through her social media feed and found it littered with doom-and-gloom posts.

“It didn’t matter the platform, it was all depressing,” she said. “If it wasn’t about the virus, it was about how people were handling it, or telling me how to try to cope with all of these changes.”

Then she spotted a friend’s front porch photo taken at another military installation. Ramsey said that with all of the uncertainty in the world, something as simple as seeing a family photo gave her joy.

“At first I just laughed and went about scrolling,” she said. “And then I thought about it and realized that, for a moment, the picture I saw made me laugh genuinely, even in the midst of all the crazy.”

Her next thought was, “Why not here?”

Ramsey proposed the idea of the Front Porch Project at Fort Drum on a couple of Facebook spouses’ pages, but initially received no response to it. She waited a day before re-posting the offer and then woke up the next morning to a flood of requests.

“To be honest, when my first post didn’t hit I had zero expectations and the only goal I wanted to achieve was to give people here at Fort Drum something to be happy about and smile about,” Ramsey said. “Then I had to find out how to accomplish this project that grew so big – way bigger than I could have ever put into a dream.”

Juggling an already hectic household schedule – she is homeschooling four of her six children who are 5 and younger – Ramsey often worked on the project late into the night. This included designing digital flyers, creating travel routes, notifying interested families through social media posts and videos and prepping her camera gear and safety items (face masks, hand sanitizer, etc.).

Then, she tested everything out during a trial run and shared some of the photos on her Facebook page.

“The weather was on my side, and it turned our great,” she said. “That gave me a good base to build up from, and I needed that more than anything while handling this project, as big as it is.”

Ramsey said that idleness was not in her upbringing. If she wasn’t occupied with chores or doing something productive, her parents would find something for her to do.

“If you ask anyone who knows me, they will tell you I always have my hand in something,” she said. “I did a full transmission swap on my car after my husband left (on deployment), and I am currently working on my motorcycle and renovating our boat in the garage.”

By the time she was ready to put her plan into action, Ramsey received messages from more than 600 households asking to participate in the project.

“This has turned into a source of excitement at a time when everyone is being disappointed and let down because all of their plans are being cancelled,” she said.

With her children bundled in the back of her black SUV, Ramsey donned her face mask and neck gaiter and headed out Saturday morning. Along the way, Ramsey livestreamed her location to keep everyone aware of her progress.

Over the course of four hours that first day, she photographed 226 families. She said that her children were troopers throughout the trip, having watched three movies and requiring only one rest stop. They also didn’t complain when she realized that she forgot the lunches she had packed for them.

Ramsey spent another six hours on Easter Sunday completing the rounds through the housing communities to photograph another 240 families. When she returned home, she found her sidewalk covered with thank-you messages written in chalk and an Easter basket for her children on the doorstep.

Ramsey said it was the most fun with photography she has had in a long time.

“Just seeing the memories being made, it just makes my day,” she said. “It makes my day being a part of those memories.”

Before starting a freelance career in 2017, she served as a health care professional for 14 years. Ramsey said that she photographed her family all the time, and became accustomed to shooting family portraits herself. She enrolled in a photography course through the New York Institute of Photography and started a freelance business.

“At first it was just a fun hobby, and then I decided to turn it into a little bit more,” Ramsey said. “I wanted to offer good photos and not break the bank, especially for my military families, and I enjoyed every minute of it.”

Then she had to put photography on hold while dealing with deaths in the family, a personal health issue and a deployment. When the pandemic hit the U.S., Ramsey said that she felt people were desperate to find something positive in what seems like dark times.

“For me, this project was a way to smile through all of the sad and uncertain times we are all facing,” she said. “For the first time, every American and every person on earth right now is dealing with the same thing, and the consensus is that this is scary.”

She said that she was thankful for everyone’s cooperation throughout the project – their patience, willingness to have fun and be creative, and the door-to-door goodwill she encountered throughout her travels. Ramsey said that the success of her project is not hers alone but something she shares with the entire community.

“Right now, I just have an overwhelming sense of honor and pride,” she said in a Facebook video. “Proud of this post, proud of this family and proud to be a military spouse. Above all else, my heart is bursting right now with immense thankfulness.”

After spending most of Easter weekend photographing community members, Ramsey is now coordinating with families who had to cancel their photo shoot or were missed, and she also wants to fulfill some requests from those who live off post. There is also the arduous task of editing hundreds of photos and sending them to family members.

If it seems like a tremendous amount of work, Ramsey does not see it that way. She said that she was constantly amazed and motivated by the people she met in a community where she has lived for the past four years.

“I have made so many friends that I never would have had the opportunity to meet had it not been for this,” she said. “I love working with people, and finding a new way to do that is a challenge I was up to. I’m happy I took the leap and jumped with both feet in.”

###

Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, julie.a.halpin2.civ@mail.mil, 315-772-8286.