

Blockade Runner treats returning military

by Brian Freskos

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In an effort to give back to the military men and women fighting overseas, the Blockade Runner Resort has issued complimentary weekend stays via a Web contest to couples with a spouse in the armed forces, said Jason St. Clair, sales manager.

“For a lot of these guys, it was going to be their only real vacation,” said Taylor Barbero, a marketing consultant for Fort Bragg in North Carolina. “They were so excited and they didn’t believe it.”

St. Clair said the resort offered the retreats both as a way to help returning service members acclimate back into society, as well as give couples and families a vacation before a spouse was to deploy.

One of the winning contestants, said Barbero, had five kids and the retreat was the only vacation the soldier had before deploying.

The complimentary weekend stay included two free nights, a bottle of champagne, chocolate covered strawberries, breakfast and a dinner for two on Saturday night.

“It seems these days that all the news is pretty much bad news,” St. Clair said. “When we can provide something for them that’s real and no strings attached — it’s come down, enjoy the ocean, enjoy Wrightsville Beach and the Blockade Runner — they were just ecstatic about it,” he said, speaking in regard to the service members who won the retreats.

“It was a chance for them to be able to get here and relax, get back into the day-to-day,” he added.

Making the transition from the high-stress work of a service member back into casual civilian life is one that can be quite difficult for some returning soldiers, said Lt. Col. Michelle Barrett of the Air Force Reserve.

“The biggest issue is any kind of reintegration,” she said, “whether it’s back to your civilian life, your family life or your civilian employment life, or even going back with your military unit from a war-type-operation tempo to coming back to a little calmer, less crisis, less shooting, peace-time environment.”

And the Blockade Runner retreats were an attempt to make this transition a little easier, St. Clair said.

He said the retreats were part of an online promotional giveaway where soldiers logged onto a Web site and registered to win.

Barbero said the contest was open to all active duty military personnel.

“We weren’t trying to really get anything out of this,” St. Clair said. “A little bit of publicity was great...but it was just to show our appreciation to the military.”

Barbero and St. Clair both said the service members who received the giveaway were “very, very happy.”

St. Clair said the service members “were kind of in shock that they had actually won something. We were making sure that we could get these guys happy when they came down here.”