

## Bus Stop Babes Support their Men in Uniform by Donating Blood for Troops

The Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) is grateful for all who give the gift of life by donating blood or platelets. January is National Blood Donor Month and the ASBP would like to highlight an inspiring group of donors.

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Maja Frigelj, Staff Writer



From left to right: Katie Helwig, Allyson Sheumaker, Holi Graves, and Brandy Meeker.

Meet at the bus stop, see the children off to school, then share common bits of daily life; experiences and challenges faced by so many wives and mothers in the military. This impromptu support group dubbed themselves *The Bus Stop Babes*.

Early one morning as Brandy skimmed the Lifestyle section of the Colorado Springs “Gazette”, she came across a listing for the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) blood drive at the United States Air Force Academy and had an idea: “Why don’t we [Bus Stop Babes] donate blood in honor of our troops and husbands who are either overseas, have been overseas, or are on their way overseas?” When she shared her idea with the rest of the Babes, Katie Helwig, Holi Graves, Allyson Sheumaker, and Ann Searle were intrigued.

“What I liked about the idea is that my husband is stationed in Baghdad right now and the blood was going there directly after the blood drive” Allyson explained.

“The appointment scheduling feature on the ASBP website is very easy to navigate so we all signed up to donate at the same time” added Brandy.

But there was a problem: Who would watch the children while the women were at the blood drive? The solution to this problem came from ASBP blood donor recruiter Carmen Dietrich-Williams. She informed them of the possibility that someone might be deferred from donating blood due to prior overseas stationing. It turns out that Carmen

Brandy Meeker wondered how she was supposed to manage in a new town, with no friends and no family to lean on. With two kids, she had just moved to Colorado Springs, CO and as a military spouse faced some unique challenges. However, as Brandy gradually became acquainted with some of the moms that dropped their children off at her children’s bus stop it turns out many of them were also wives of soldiers.

Soon a bond grew among these women and what started out as a daily bus-stop chore became an anticipated tradition:

was right; Holi and Ann were unable to donate blood this time around, but they could instead be the solution to their problem of child care.

Ann stayed with all the kids as the designated baby sitter while Holi went along to the drive for moral support for the three other women. “It was Brandy’s first time giving blood, so I had to hold her hand and purse- it was a very integral part of it all” laughs Holi. “Thankfully they had candy for us after we donated!” adds Brandy about her first blood donation experience.

Although this blood drive was Brandy’s first blood donating experience, Allyson is a blood-giving veteran, so-to-speak. “While stationed in Louisiana, our church held blood drives every eight weeks. Our kids came with us to learn the importance of blood donation and volunteering at blood drives.” explains Allyson. While it is important to learn early on that blood is perishable and is needed on a consistent basis, some of the other children are too young to understand this. “My pre-schooler was at Ann’s house when we all went to donate. He could have cared less about what we were doing as he was just happy to be playing with Mrs. Ann! She has an arcade in her basement; who wouldn’t want to play there?” jokes Allyson.

Even though Ann and Holi were unable to donate blood, they enabled others to donate while they volunteered their babysitting and hand-holding skills. Because of their great help and support, Ann and Holi received T-shirts and pens as a token of ASBP’s appreciation for their efforts.

Katie explains: “This group that we put together is really helpful- it’s nice to have a support system, especially because we move a lot. Since we are about 20 minutes from the nearest base it’s great to live in a neighborhood where we share the same lifestyle. It makes it so much easier to support our husbands while they’re away.” Holi adds: “Our military lifestyle really brings us together.”

The *Bus Stop Babes* plan to make blood donations and volunteer support a regular activity from now on and hope to inspire others to do the same. “As a matter of fact, when we came back from the blood drive we inspired another woman on our block to donate blood that same evening!” says Katie.

These women are a true inspiration to our community and we hope that others will be inspired to donate blood to our Military men and women while they are away.

If you would like to support our troops, please take the *Bus Stop Babes*’ lead and sign up online for a blood drive near you at: [www.militaryblood.dod.mil](http://www.militaryblood.dod.mil) .