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PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Tabitha Gavia, the first female senior enlisted leader for U.S. Army Recruiting Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, visits Union High School in Vancouver during her recent stops in the Portland area to visit Armed Forces recruiting stations and local schools.

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Jason Grinyshyn, 14, attempts a pull up as Sgt. Juan Rodriguez looks on during a recent Army recruitment event at Union High School in Vancouver.

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Recruiting Challenge

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

from medical jobs to intelligence jobs to learning how to speak Arabic and Chinese...I mean there's a wide range of jobs out there for young people. And it certainly should be considered an option," she said, adding that becoming a doctor or lawyer are also viable military career paths for enlistees.

Throughout her own Army career, Gavia has garnered a long list of impressive jobs working in the physics, medical, and leadership fields. She also has an associate's degree in technology, a Bachelor of Science in liberal arts, and a Master of Business Administration.

As the recipient of multiple honors through the years, including the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, and Meritorious Service Medal, Gavia said the Army can help young people stick with goals they've set out for themselves, just as it did for her.

"When they leave the military, they do better in college. People who serve in the military generally vote...they generally make their invested interest in the community known," she said.

As an African American woman, Gavia said she's faced challenges along the way rising in the ranks of the military.

"I joined the military 31 years ago. And life was very different 31 years ago than it is today. And so people thought differently about things. They weren't as educated on diversity and prejudice and discrimination as they are now," she said.

Gavia added that today the military has a robust equal-opportunity program to prevent prejudicial behaviors and attitudes from pervading. Overall, the experience of team-building the Army provided made her a stronger person, she said.

"The Army develops teams and it develops leaders and it makes us strong. And I couldn't imagine doing anything else," she said.

It was reported last month that the Army was about 6,500 people short of reaching their recruiting goals this fiscal year, for the first time in more a decade, despite other service branches meeting their targets.

Gavia pointed out that the Army did sign up more people this past year than they have since

2010. She was confident that by getting the message out and implementing modern incentives for enlistments, that the recruiting goals will be met in the future.

"We're putting together a cross-fit team to travel across the country to compete and recruit. And we've also identified that we have young people interested in e-gaming. And so we're putting together an e-gaming team," she said.

Gavia, who was raised in Virginia, said her father, who served in Vietnam, instilled the values of servicing a bigger cause than herself from a young age.

"He wanted us to serve something; it didn't have to be the military. He would've been just as happy if I went off with the Peace Corps or if I did volunteer 10 hours a week with the Red Cross," she said.

It wasn't until Gavia went to college for a few months that she realized she wanted something more.

"I didn't feel included, I think. And every time I'd see my father with folks growing up, it's just a team, a family...I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself," she said.

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