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June 16, 2010

By: Liz Fabian

Red Cross hires Macon-Bibb EMA operations chief

The Central Georgia chapter of the American Red Cross has tapped the current operations officer of the Macon-Bibb County Emergency Management Agency to lead its emergency services.

LaTravius Smith, who served as acting EMA director following the retirement of Johnny Wingers, will soon oversee disaster and armed services operations for Red Cross in Macon, Warner Robins, Dublin and 22 surrounding counties.

"I am eager and excited," Smith said. "It is definitely a promotion."

The Red Cross is consolidating the three chapters under a single staff to maximize resources, said Tracy Willis-Kight, executive director of the Central Georgia Chapter of the American Red Cross.

"She just comes with already a wealth of knowledge," Willis-Kight said. "Our volunteers really like her and are acquainted with her. Even throughout the state, the American Red Cross staff has worked with LaTravius and speak very highly of her, so it will be a smooth transition." Smith personally experienced how the American Red Cross helps families in time of tragedy. While stationed with the U.S. Army in Hawaii, the organization flew her and her son home following the death of her grandmother.

"This would be an opportunity for me to be part of something bigger than myself," Smith said.

Working at the EMA for eight years has been great experience for Smith, who has a total of almost 11 years with the city of Macon, she said.

Smith, a 36-year-old mother of three children, admits she was disappointed to be passed over twice for the EMA director position.

Wingers groomed her through the years to assume that position, she said.

"I looked at it as big shoes to fill, but it was something I knew I could do," Smith said.

Late last year, Macon City Council rejected North Carolina paramedic Michael Smith as Mayor Robert Reichert's first choice to replace Wingers. After Smith withdrew from consideration, current director Donald Druitt Sr. was selected in February. Some council members still favored Smith for the position.

Councilwoman Elaine Lucas, who was among the most vocal council supporters for Smith to be promoted to the top EMA position, said Tuesday she was disappointed to see Smith leave.

"I wish her well," Lucas said. "Of course, we hate to lose someone who has invested that number of years in our city. But I think that's what happens when you fail to promote folks who give loyal, competent service to our city. She will do well. Our loss is their gain."

Smith replaces former Red Cross emergency services director Ryan Logan, who recently was promoted within the organization.

Friday is expected to be her last day in the EMA office, she said.