

# WALTER

*RALEIGH'S Life & Soul*

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## Our Town: Game Plan: Philoptochos



Lekita Esse, left, Athena Hartwig, center, and Irene Iatridis work to assemble and organize bags during a preparatory session of the Gi women's group.

“We’re learning that there are more and more female veterans who are homeless.

We want to bring awareness to that issue and contribute.

—*Lekita Essa, Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society member*

by Jessie Ammons

photograph by Ray Black III

“Philoptochos is a Greek word that translates to ‘friends of the poor,’ and our local chapter is the Agape chapter, the Greek word Lekita Essa. Essa went to her first Philoptochos monthly Sunday meeting at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox church with her godmother, Philoptochos founding member, 108-year-old Pota Vallas (who was featured in the February 2016 issue of *Walter*). She was impressed by the group’s civic projects and immediately plugged in. “It does beautiful work here in our community and all over the U.S.”

Essa knows about the nationwide work because, in addition to serving with her 70-some fellow Agape chapter members, she serves on the Philoptochos board. And, although she’s admittedly biased, Essa believes the Raleigh chapter stands out. “I’ve got to tell you: While everything nationwide, obviously larger cities have more members and then they have the ability to give much more money. But we are known to be one of the hardest-working chapters, and we give thousands and thousands of dollars each year.”

Philoptochos dollars locally go to Backpack Buddies, the Pretty in Pink Foundation, InterAct, and Alliance Medical Ministry, among others. Each month, the Agape ladies are busy focusing on a new cause to the group: homeless female veterans. They’ve been filling water-resistant bags with toiletries, fast food gift cards, and other personal items. When Holy Trinity hosts a regional laity conference in June – in which more than 70 regional Greek Orthodox churches will convene in Raleigh – the Agape volunteers will distribute the bags along with Philoptochos members from throughout the Southeast. “We embrace and welcome everyone’s ideas in this organization. It’s an amazing community.”

