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- News
- Sports
- Editorial
- Letters
- Events
- Police & Courts
- Obituaries

### Features

- Classifieds
- Photo Gallery

### Information

- About The Courier
- Links
- Forms
- Newsstands
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- Contact Us
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- Home



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THE ONLINE EDITION OF THE COURIER

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## Strangers share hearts with soldiers

By **Janice Penix**  
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Erin Aylor doesn't have any friends or loved ones currently serving in the military overseas. However, she has sent more than 30 packages to soldiers who are on active duty across the ocean.

Aylor finds soldiers to help through a Web site she just happened to learn about through a mail-out from Sen. Mark Pryor's office. The Web site — Anysoldier.com — serves more than 40,000 soldiers by allowing viewers to find out what needs each specific soldier has and providing a contact for each soldier.

"I'm just obsessed with it," Aylor said. "There are a lot of people out there that need support. I don't have anybody in the military, but I still want to help."

Aylor, who is the Child Nutrition Supervisor for the Russellville School District, has sent packages and letters to soldiers stationed in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The soldiers she sends to are from many different areas in the United States. Only one she has contacted so far is from Arkansas.

"This is a way for people to help do something," Aylor said. "Everyone has a yellow sticker on their car, and that's good. I have one, too. But we need to do something."

The Web site works by providing a list of soldiers who have registered through the site. Individuals who want to help can click on a soldier's name to find out what the soldier needs or wants specifically.

For example, Aylor said, a soldier may need small bars of soap or cans of tuna or want to receive letters or newspapers. The individual who wants to send items knows exactly what each soldier needs.

"That's the beauty of it," Aylor said. "People tell you exactly what they want and need. Sometimes you might send something that they can't really use, so this way, you know they're going to use it."

"You know what you send is never wasted."

Aylor said many of the soldiers she has contacted enjoy receiving letters, newspapers or magazines. She said even though many of them are not from Arkansas, they want her to send her local newspaper because they want some news from home.

Other things Aylor said she has sent include compact discs and batteries and photos of fall leaves or other seasonal landscapes.

Anysoldier.com is the home page for AnySoldier, Inc., which started as a family effort by Marty and Sue Horn, according to the Web site.

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The Horns began sending care packages to their son, Brian, an Army sergeant with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The Horns knew the unit was living under very rough conditions, so they sent the packages as often as they could.

Marty Horn, a 20-year Army veteran himself, created the Web site in August 2003 to help other soldiers serving alongside their son. On Jan. 1, 2004, the site expanded to support other military units.

Although the Horns projected they would have 50 volunteer contact soldiers by the following Christmas, by early June they had 100.

The Web site works by providing contact names. Those contacts forward packages and letters to soldiers in need. When an individual sends a package or letter, it is addressed to the contact soldier, then followed by the words 'Attn: Any Soldier.' The contact soldiers are volunteers and the 'Attn' line will direct them to distribute letters and packages to soldiers who get very little, if any, mail.

The site provides suggestions on what to send as well as how to send letters and packages.

According to the Web site, support for soldiers increases during the holiday season, but Aylor said it's important to remember that soldiers need support the rest of the year as well.

"It's not just about Christmas, and it's not just about buying stuff," Aylor said. "Most of the time they're as appreciative of a card with a picture as they are with a package of stuff.

"It's been a real blessing to me."

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