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College Student Proves One Person Can Make A Difference

Melissa Sullivan Exemplifies The Spirit Of South Florida

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DAVIE, Fla. -- For some, the war in Iraq is a distant war that doesn't affect their daily lives. But for others it has a profound impact, especially for Melissa Sullivan, of Davie.

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Sullivan exemplifies not only the Spirit of South Florida, but she also proves that one person can make a difference.

Sullivan looks like a normal first-year college student, but she is much more. She's on a one-woman mission to help our troops in Iraq. "It's been a really big challenge, you know, just starting really small and trying to help one person out and now it's just grown to over 60 people that I've been in contact with, sending them packages," Sullivan said.

The mission started in early January when Sullivan's boyfriend, Lance Cpl. Christopher Gustafsson, a Marine reserve from Hialeah, was sent to Fallujah.

"I started researching ways of how I could help other soldiers and I found a Web site, AnySoldier.com," Sullivan said.

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From there her journey began. Sullivan started sending care packages to troops who rarely get letters from home.

"It mainly depends on the individual's request, but a majority of the soldiers and Marines really like candy," Sullivan said. "Also, toiletries are very important."

But candy and toiletries can add up and Sullivan was paying for everything herself. So, she and her sister went door to door in their neighborhood, asking for donations with one thing in mind.

"There are thousands upon thousands of soldiers who are over there who don't have that support on a daily basis who really need to know they are appreciated," she said.

Sullivan makes sure of that when shopping at BJ's for her supplies.

"First we are going to go and get a majority of the candies. A lot of people like to eat healthy so Nutri-Grain is good for that," Sullivan said. "Beef jerky is a must-have."

Sullivan does all this with boundless energy and a loving passion. While she did receive a commendation as an honorary patriot from one battalion, she realizes not every soldier can write back. But there are those who do and their letters only inspire her to do more.

One soldier wrote, "Dear Melissa, Thank you very much for the package. The candy went quick. Thank you for all of your prayers. It is because of people like yourself that make being over here worthwhile."

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