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## Girl Scout's project helps soldiers in Iraq

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**By Pat Sherman**

UNION-TRIBUNE COMMUNITY NEWS WRITER

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RANCHO PENASQUITOS – Mt. Carmel High School sophomore Kayla Deck developed a fascination with birds when she was young.

As a Girl Scout project when she was in the fifth grade, Kayla helped her grandfather design and construct 10 birdhouses for a group of endangered Western bluebirds that began wintering on his five-acre property.

To obtain her Senior Girl Scout Leadership Award, Kayla is currently giving flight to items of comfort and necessity for soldiers serving in Iraq.

The 15-year-old has collected more than 50 care packages from Rancho Peñasquitos Girl Scout troops to send to the soldiers.

Recently, Kayla sorted through a sea of white cardboard on her living room floor, packing and taking inventory. Her mother, Marjorie, helped fill out customs slips and address labels, because Kayla has a mild form of cerebral palsy, which makes writing difficult for her.

“My mom and I went on a Web site called [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com) and we looked up what items some of the soldiers would like, and then

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I typed up a wish list of items for the soldiers and a list of restrictions," Kayla said.

Items collected included DVDs, arts supplies, games, playing cards, batteries, disposable cameras, beef jerky, cookies, snacks, energy bars, hard candy, deodorant, sunscreen and shampoo.

"We have to put items that might spill, like conditioner, shampoo and other things, in bags so that if they spill they go in the bag, instead of all over the other things," Kayla said.

Kayla chose to make the care packages for her leadership project because her cousin, Trace Lundberg, is serving near the Iraq-Iran border.

On the Web site, they found pictures of Camp Caldwell, where he is stationed.

Marjorie called facilities at the camp "primitive."

"They don't have a PX, their chow hall is closing, and they're going to have to use the Iraqi mess hall," she said.

Kayla is shipping boxes to troops serving at Caldwell, and to soldiers from San Diego who are stationed elsewhere. She found them all on the Web site, where deployed soldiers who choose to participate post their information and the items they want.

Kayla presented her service project to Girl Scouts at a meeting of the Canyon Crest service unit, which includes troops from around Rancho Peñasquitos. Each troop collected items for one soldier.

The boxes include letters of support from the girls.

One letter composed by "Olivia" of Troop 8087 included a drawing of a four-leaf clover. It read: "Dear soldier, I wish you a very safe trip back. I also hope and wish you were here with your family, safe. Thank you very much for keeping our country and state safe. ... Happy Valentine's Day."

Kayla said she is glad to help people serving in the war.

"I think it feels great that I'm helping the other Girl Scouts to support the servicemen and women overseas," she said.

Her troop leader, Dana Kloo, said the leadership project is a precursor to the Gold Award, one of Scouting's highest honors.

Kayla is currently serving as president of her troop, helping run meetings and prepare the agendas. She has been involved in Scouting since age 9.

"I think it's given her a bigger picture of the community, for sure," her

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mother said of Scouting. "It'll certainly (look good) to a college, because of the leadership and community service experiences."

About twice a month, Kayla visits her grandfather's house, where the bluebirds still return to feed on mealworms and raisins. She enjoys bird-watching at the nearby Wildlife Research Institute in Ramona.

"She's into birding, and she knows almost all the birds," said her grandfather, John Deck. "We also had some California gnatcatchers that she spotted."

Though Kayla has not planned her Gold Award project yet, her mother smiled, speculating, "We're guessing it's going to have something to do with birds."

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