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Communities respond to plea for goods to ease war's pain

By Don Leavitt, Contributing Writer



Regional

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Region – Thanks to the drive of one person and the generosity of people and organizations in the area, about 500 individual "care packages" were recently assembled and shipped to troops serving in Iraq and other war zones, with the hope that they would make life a little easier for those serving overseas.

Struck by the simple goal of a Web site she visited, www.anysoldier.com, Southborough resident Lisa Braccio, 38, decided she'd see what she could do to help. The Any Soldier site started in 2003 as a simple family effort to help the soldiers in one U.S. Army unit. The organizers collected the names of individuals within small units in Iraq or Afghanistan who would be willing to receive boxes and then distribute the contents to members of his or her unit. That idea triggered so many requests that it was expanded in 2004 to include any member of the U.S. armed forces around the world.

Locally, Braccio produced and distributed hundreds of simple one-page flyers inviting readers to make donations at the designation locations Aug. 13 and 14, and provided a list of 40 items that were the most needed or requested by the troops. The list of suggested items ranged from fruit rollups, beef jerky, microwave popcorn and lollipops (for both soldiers and kids) to sunscreen, deodorant, short white socks, baby wipes, computer games and game systems.

The last item on the list read: "Most importantly, bring letters and cards. Some service people receive no mail at all. All cards and letters received will be inserted in packages [as they are assembled]."

In the first two weeks of August, the Stop and Shop stores in Westborough and Framingham agreed to serve as collection points for donations, and Southborough gave the okay for Braccio and her volunteers to use the parking lot at Woodward School as headquarters for the operation. The Post Office gave her more than 500 boxes and rolls of tape to seal them as they were filled.

Before the weekend started, Braccio said she hoped the drive might fill 500 boxes. By the evening of Aug. 14, she and her crew had filled and sealed 550 boxes and she had cash donations to cover the cost of postage to send them overseas. She added that, in addition to sending boxes to Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan, some went out to units in Bosnia and the Philippines.

This drive was so successful, Braccio said, that she plans to organize another effort, probably in October.

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