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Boxes for soldiers packed with care

Austinite has sent 182 packages to 'adopted' troops serving abroad, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By [Marty Toohey](#)
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Mary Jo Miller hasn't seen the top of her dining room table in nearly two years.

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is covered with stacks of them, one comes to soldiers, from toothpaste to movie rentals to DVDs of the movie "Talladega Nights." The 74-year-old Austin woman got the idea of sending care packages when CNN ran a short feature on Anysoldier.com, a Web site that connects troops with people looking to make donations.



Larry Kolvoord
AMERICAN-STATESMAN

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

With help from her husband and Bible study group, Mary Jo Miller sends care packages to 19 soldiers serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo. She has surrendered her dining table to the effort.

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Since then, she said, she has sent 182 boxes to the troops she has adopted.

"We try to do it on a personal basis," she said, "and lately word has gotten around."

Miller now sends packages to 19 soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo. Several, she said, do not receive packages from anyone else and were suggested by fellow soldiers.

Toothbrushes, shaving cream and baby wipes are among the staples stacked on her table. For service women, she has nail polish and lip gloss.

Burl Sumrall, Miller's son and a retired Marine, once told her that people in his unit in Okinawa traded an entire day's worth of food for a can of fruit, so she sends canned fruit regularly, along with Vienna sausages and trail mix and Kool-Aid of all flavors.

For a while, the troops had been requesting beef jerky, Miller said, but they now seem to have tired of it.

"As I get to know them," she said, "I get a feel for what they like."

At first, she and her husband, Tom Miller Jr., put the boxes together. Then her Bible study group at Woodlawn Baptist Church, which includes several veterans, started giving money.

The operation won't get any bigger, Miller said. She said larger groups have asked hers to join them, but that would hinder the personal touch she wants.

People can give her goods to pass along, Miller said, "but we want it understood it would go out in the name of our Sunday school class."

One soldier, 2nd Lt. Andrew Figer, has been in Iraq for a month, and his parents attend Woodlawn Baptist.

Figer asked Miller for school supplies and candy. When the box arrived, he distributed its contents to Iraqi children. In a letter to Miller, he wrote that Iraqi children now line up outside the gates of his base.

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He has gotten three boxes since.

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