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[Web site directs cards and packages to soldiers](#)

By Maggie Rhynes Word Reporter

While thousands of Americans spent the holiday season overseas serving their country, those back home and right here in the Illinois Valley, made sure their holidays didn't go uncelebrated.

When Kathy Cattani, Ladd, received word from her son Zach who is serving in Iraq, that many of the soldiers around him were not receiving packages, she launched Project Santa.

The project sought to collect various items ranging from hygiene products to DVDs to be sent to area soldiers, packaged appropriately in big red stockings.

While area businesses served as collection locations, students at Illinois Valley Community College, led by the Young Republicans and their faculty adviser Dorene Perez, also got in on the action. Individual students, as well as entire classes and other campus organizations made donations.

"The response was very overwhelming at IVCC," Perez said. "The collections from the college filled more than 160 stockings as well as a box of leftover items to be added to other stockings.

In all, 13,000 stockings were filled and sent to local soldiers.

"We were very proud to be a small part of the project, which was overwhelming when you think about it. So many people worked so hard it was very heartwarming to see it all come together. It took a tremendous amount of courage to undertake a project like that and I think both Kathy and her son Zach are heroes," Perez said.

While the soldiers receiving the stockings stuffed through the Project Santa plan surely got what they wanted for Christmas, soldiers overseas are in need of packages and letters on a daily basis.

For those looking to help out a soldier, but without a name or address to send a package to, there is AnySoldier.com.

According to the Web site, the AnySoldier program began in August 2003 when Sergeant Brian Horn formed the program to help his fellow comrades. Horn agreed to deliver packages to soldiers in need if they arrived addressed to Any Soldier.

The project has since expanded and now includes members of the Army, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Navy.

Individuals serving in any branch of the armed forces can now log on to AnySoldier.com and post a request for whatever they need.

While some are in need of necessities and others are craving chocolate bars and barbeque potato chips, a large number of the soldiers are just looking for someone to send them a letter.

For those at a loss of what to say to a soldier, the Web site advises that writing a letter is the easiest thing to send.

They suggest writing as if you are writing to a friend, as that is what the soldier is likely to become.

Writers hoping to hear back are encouraged to include a return address as well as an email address.

Guidelines also are available with information about how to package items, what not to send and how to get the package where it is going.

Individuals wanting to participate can simply log on to the Web site www.ansoldier.com and follow the Where to Send link to a long list of notes posted by soldiers.

As winter is in full force in the Midwest, many of the notes posted remind readers that although Afghanistan may look like a desert, it is freezing during the winter months.

Many of the soldiers are requesting warm gear, gloves and space heaters. Still, many just want a bag of Cheetos, a new pillow or a letter from back home.

Those sending items are advised to address the pack to Any Soldier, followed by the address listed on the post.

The packages are distributed to soldiers in that particular unit. Also noted on the notes posted by soldiers are the number of male and female soldiers they are able to distribute items too.

This makes it possible for organizations to find a post which may have the ability to reach dozens, or even hundreds of soldiers at once, and then hold a collection to be sent to that unit.

At IVCC, nursing instructor and POWER advisor, Kim Abel encourages everyone to get involved with the website which she calls "fascinating."

Abel notes everyone can participate, even if just with a letter.

The group maintains a large cardboard box with the AnySoldier.com logo in the college library. There, students can drop off goods of any type to be sent to soldiers via the AnySoldier Web site.

The thankful posts from soldiers on the Web site assures readers the program is working just as it should.

Recently, several post thanking participants have been left by soldiers. One Marine post read, "The big holiday is over, with the support of everyone through AnyMarine it was a wonderful day. Everybody received at least four items of one sort or another. Myself and the Gunny spent the morning driving



around passing out stockings and making sure all of our Marines had received something.”

Another thankful Marine posted, “Thank you ever so much for what you are doing first off. It was a great joy to be able to hand out over 10 letters so far to the Marines in my platoon. The smiles that it brought to them was a great thing to see. Even though we may not be in the worst part of Iraq, it is still the holiday season and the cards were awesome.”