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Wildwood elementary School students sending packages to troops

Treats can be dropped off for soldiers

By **MARK NEWMAN** Courier staff writer

OTTUMWA — Doing something for others can be a learning experience, especially when those others are troops 9,000 miles from home.

At Wildwood Elementary School, resource teacher Amber Nelson is mustering her troops; kindergarten through sixth-grade students are decorating boxes, addressing envelopes and stacking supplies for Iowa troops serving overseas.

“I’ve got a friend who’s overseas who I’ve sent a few packages to,” Nelson said. “So I was looking for a list of things to send and came across the anysoldier.com site.”

The Internet site lists soldiers who would like to receive mail from the United

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States. They can request things they want, too, from letters about home to beef jerky to magazines.

"I saw how many names there were from Iowa and thought it'd be fun," Nelson said.

Sixth-graders were helping Nelson Thursday afternoon. They were decorating boxes to leave at Hy-Vee so residents can drop off treats for the soldiers. Each box will have a list of suggested items.

Meanwhile, sixth-grader Sadie Shaw was getting care packages ready to ship. That's the best part, Sadie said.

"[We're] giving this stuff to them because they really need it," she said. "They can't go to the store."

Nelson is well aware of that. Before becoming a teacher, she joined the U.S. Army Reserves and was assigned to the 389th Engineer Battalion out of Iowa City. After a particularly destructive hurricane, they were deployed to Guatemala to rebuild a bridge and a daycare center.

Getting the kids involved in the current project was an easy choice.

"You can do more that way, and I think it's good for them to do something for someone else," she said. "Plus, it makes them more interested in what's going on over there, and addressing boxes where the different countries are located."

As care packages pile up, the only expense the school needs help with will be shipping, she said: about \$8 per soldier.

Meanwhile, the students are learning things like social studies, geography and writing in a practical way.

In addition to letter writing to real people, the older kids are helping by actually filling out the customs forms that are required for each box.

Donations can be sent to the school and items can be dropped off at North or South Hy-Vee locations.

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