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Shipped with care

By **Elizabeth Malloy**/ emalloj@cnc.com
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The average American soldier fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan is 18 to 26-years-old, not much older than the many students at Marshfield High School. Those students will be showing their support for the troops this holiday season by participating in two efforts to help raise moral for military personnel fighting overseas.

The MHS Student Council is working with the Marshfield Veterans' Services and student faculty to send care packages to troops stationed in the Middle East and to send DVDs to wounded soldiers in a US military hospital in Germany.

"I've been looking for someone to step forward and do this for about a year now and the Marshfield Student Council decided to start it up again," said Veterans' Agent Dick Martin.

According to Martin, the care packages will be shipped to soldiers picked at random from a Web Site called anysoldier.com, which was designed by a man with a son in the military. The Web Site provides the name and address of a soldier overseas. The DVDs will go to the "Take a Wounded Soldier to the Movies" program, designed by a chaplain at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany where many soldiers injured in the Middle East are sent for treatment. Participants are asked to donate DVD, microwave popcorn, a box of candy and a phone card with at least 120 minutes on it.

While the care packages are being shipped through anysoldier.com, Martin said that if someone knows of a soldier with a Marshfield connection, contact him at the Veterans' office, or the high school and they will make sure the Marshfield soldier gets a package as well.

"The purpose of this is to give soldiers overseas some contact with home," said Sally Marples, an MHS librarian who is helping with the effort at the school. "Obviously we're not going to turn this into a miniature oasis out there in the desert, but we're giving them a piece of home."

Marples said that the plan is to put up lists of needed items in all of MHS' homerooms and have students sign up to bring an item or too. The military has released a list of needed items, and certain items that are unacceptable. Homemade items, things that can leak, alcohol, pornography, cigarettes and Bibles are among the items that cannot be shipped, in part because the packages need to go through customs in Middle Eastern countries where some of those items are forbidden. Items such as sun block, dental floss, socks, vitamins, batteries, potato chips, board games and journals are all encouraged.

Two Marshfield women with children at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Naval Academy at Annapolis spearheaded a care package effort last year, sending about 455 boxes, weighing about 9-pounds each to soldiers. However those women weren't able to take on the huge effort this year, so Martin said he was glad someone else did. There was about \$600 left over from that effort that will go towards postage for this year's shipments.





Marples said postage is the costliest part of such an endeavor. She helped send packages to troops during the first Gulf War in the early 1990s as well.

In addition to shipping material goods, Marples said students will also be asked to send messages of encouragement to the troops if they want, but she said students have been asked to leave politics out of any notes they send, however.






"This is not an appropriate vehicle if you have concerns about our foreign policy," she said.

Marples said she thinks the students will use common sense in the items they ship and the DVDs they choose to send.

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The packages will be shipped out toward the end of November, in hopes that they will reach the soldiers by Christmas, Marples said.

"It's so meaningful to these soldiers who get a box or a letter from people back home," said Martin. "They hear about the [presidential] election and politics and they have a lot of questions in their minds about what they're doing and why they're there, and they need to know that the American people are behind them."

Martin and Marples both said that anyone else who is interested in contributing to this effort is welcome to do so. Marples can be reached at MHS at (781) 319-3570 and Martin can be reached at (781) 834-5576.

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