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Overseas TLC

## Organizations Help Send Holiday Packages to Troops

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Our troops won't be home for the holidays. But there are many people working hard to bring home to them.

Like Dotty Selmeczki, mother to a Marine sergeant stationed in Iraq. And Carolyn Dew whose boyfriend is fighting there as well. Both women volunteer their time at Operation: MOM, a grass-roots organization in Castro Valley, Calif., whose main priority these days has been wrapping gifts and getting them in the mail in time to reach our young men and women overseas.

"I think it's important when people help the troops," said Dew. "By helping organizations like us, people aren't making a statement about whether they support the war or not. They're just making it a little more tolerable for the soldiers."

As president of Operation: MOM, Selmeczki has organized volunteers to assemble packages filled with everything from socks to soap. By mid-November, they had mailed more than 1,000 parcels for the troops to have a few goodies by Christmas.

Selmeczki encourages those interested in volunteering to find groups in their local communities that are sending packages to PLEASE SEE OVERSEAS, PAGE D6

### HOW TO HELP THE TROOPS

The U.S. Department of Defense has a Web site -- hit the "Support Troops" link at [www.defendamerica.mil](http://www.defendamerica.mil) -- that lists groups supporting the troops. Here you'll find information on everything from who is accepting donations -- such as the American Red Cross and the USO -- to getting connected with locally formed groups, like the Carolina Troop Supporters.

If you are looking for ideas of what to send, Any Soldier Inc.'s Web site -- [www.anysoldier.us](http://www.anysoldier.us) -- lists supplies that deployed troops need, such as prepackaged food, T-shirts and even Beanie Babies that they can give to local children. The site provides specific information about how and where to send packages.

Any Soldier also accepts donations to send to service men and women abroad. The group was



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created by Marty and Sue Horn in La Plata, Md., after their son, Brian, an Army sergeant, was sent to Iraq last year.

The Horns started sending their son care packages and soon were also sending packages for his fellow soldiers who weren't receiving mail. Then the Horns were asking friends and neighbors to get involved.

Although Brian has been redeployed, Any Soldier Inc. continues to grow. It has more than 100 volunteers and requests for packages continue to pour in from units throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The American public wants to do something to show support," said Marty Horn, a 20-year army veteran.

Operation Uplink -- [www.operationuplink.org](http://www.operationuplink.org) -- is a program sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign War and others, helping military personnel and hospitalized veterans stay in touch with their families by providing them with a free phone card. Operation Uplink purchases phone cards and distributes them to service men and women.

Ellen Krenke, a Department of Defense spokeswoman, said items mailed to "Any Service Member" -- a popular way to address packages during previous wars -- will no longer be accepted, because of security concerns and transportation constraints. Packages must be addressed to a particular person.

"We don't want to discourage people from supporting the troops," she said. "We just want to make sure the mail lines are clear for those family members sending packages overseas to loved ones in the military."

She suggests waiting until after the holiday rush to send packages to non-family military personnel. Last December, she said, the Postal Service processed more than 8 million pounds of mail to the troops.

Some people have tried to avoid the "Any Service Member" prohibition, she said, by sending large numbers of packages to an individual service member's overseas address. However, this clogs the mail system and causes unnecessary delays in delivery.

Currently, there are about 500,000 men and women in the military overseas, including 140,000 military personnel in Iraq, Krenke said.

## GET IT THERE IN TIME

The deadline to send cards and letters via First Class Mail or Priority Mail is Dec. 6 or 11, depending on the APO/FPO code -- more formally known as the Air/Army Post Office or Fleet Post Office. The deadline for Parcel Airlift Mail, also known as PAL, is Dec. 4; for Space Available Mail, SAM, it's Saturday.

Send before the deadline, if possible.

Mail should include the service member's full name with or without rank or rating, the unit and APO/

FPO address with the nine-digit ZIP code, if one is assigned. Also include a return address. Print the recipient's address in the lower right portion of the front of the package.

Marisa Osorio Colon writes for the New York Times Regional Newspapers.

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