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### Local woman helped soldiers overseas

*Synopsis: This story is about how a caring North Port woman sent boxes filled with helpful things to soldiers over sea.*

NORTH PORT -- Candy, deodorant and sunglasses are just a few items almost everyone has or can obtain easily, but not if you're stationed in the desert.

America's soldiers often fill their wish lists with little things that many people take for granted.

Carol Whitham understood there was a need. She often spent more than she could afford to help as many overseas soldiers as possible.

"Once I began sending them items, it became an addiction," Whitham said. "It was hard to walk into a store and see something soldiers wanted and not buy it for them."

Whitham, a long time North Port resident, experienced what she calls an "addiction" to good will.

After discovering a Web site called AnySoldier.com, Whitham obtained contact information on many soldiers. They are encouraged to post list items they need of or would love to have.

The public can read through the names and stories posted and select which units they wish to support. The site provides information on what to send and how to send it directly to the soldiers.

On the AnySoldier.com home page there's a warning to the public stating the contents of this site are "addictive," and "people using the site may be overcome with tears of sympathy or joy."

The warning on the site also says exploring AnySoldier.com may cause a sense of pride in the great nation and the fighting men and women who defend its freedom.

"I was so excited when I received three letters in one day from Iraq," Whitham said.

With the help of her husband, George, this compassionate woman first began sending packages to soldiers overseas in November, but stopped in March due to lack of funds.

During the four-month period, the couple estimates spending about \$3,000 on items and shipping costs, benefiting more than 70 soldiers overseas.

"The costs eventually caught up to us," Carol said sadly about having to stop sending packages.

One of the many soldiers the couple was able to reach, is Kevin A. McManus, a pilot from the 101st Airborne Division. He is originally from a little town called Weare, New Hampshire. Now he lives in Tennessee and his parents live in Florida.

"I'm so impressed with the support we receive from people all over the United States," McManus told the Whithams in an e-mail. "This

shows me how great a nation I serve."

Carol said one of the things she learned through this experience is that most soldiers overseas feel they needed to be there to make a difference.

"The soldiers just want to hear the general public say thank you," Whitham said.

McManus would agree.

In an e-mail to the Whithams, he mentioned it was great replying to many letters school kids wrote to his unit because he loves answering their questions. Dropping off toys for the children overseas is one of the soldiers' tasks.

"That is the joy of being a pilot here," McManus told the Whithams. "I love to watch the kids run out of their houses to see if we will drop some goodies."

Despite the many detailed responses Carol received from the soldiers overseas, she said she never wanted to get involved in the politics side of the topic. Her only intention was to help make the soldiers' lives more comfortable while away from home.

"I had a whole scenario set up in the garage and I figured out the way to send the packages for a lower cost," Whitham said.

Although the couple paid for much of the costs, they did receive some contributions from local businesses. The packages they mailed included basic necessity, food, and fun items.

White socks, pajamas, deodorant, underwear, Crystal Light powder, popcorn, sunflower seeds, are some examples of the things she sent to the soldiers.

Carol didn't just focus on the necessities of her "children away from home," but on things that would form a smile on their face. She gave stuffed animals, movies, CDs, and bobble head dolls.

One of her pilots who she had sent a head wobble with a note saying 'take me flying with you" attached sent her a picture of the item overseeing Iraq as he flew in a helicopter.

"It was a very rewarding thing to do," Whitham said. "I'm still receiving e-mail from soldiers."


She said if any organizations or people are interested in writing to soldiers or sending them packages, she would be happy to show them how to utilize the AnySoldier.com Web site.

"You will never know how much you have affected soldiers with you caring support," McManus wrote to supporters of his unit.

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