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It's crucial to have the right address

Groups offer guidelines for sending packages to military personnel

Friday, November 19, 2004

BY MEGAN WALDE
 Of The Patriot-News

If you want to share holiday cheer with soldiers and sailors serving overseas, be careful how you address your mail.

The U.S. Postal Service won't accept letters or packages not addressed to a specific service member, and the Department of Defense discourages bulk mailings altogether.

The postal service stopped delivering mail marked "To any soldier" after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Judy Jones is founder of the York-based Support Our American Recruits, a national organization that does a holiday card drive each year. The group bulk packages cards to soldiers who share them with others.

Jones says service members need to know who is sending them mail.

"They need to know they have our support and know they are loved," she said. "But if somebody sends an envelope full of dust, whether it's anthrax or not,

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there's fear raised by that."

Suppose you don't know anyone serving overseas and still want to support the troops.

The Defense Department lists other options at www.defendamerica.mil.

One program is Any Soldier Inc., which started last year in the La Plata, Md., home of Marty Horn.

Horn's son is a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade that served in Iraq earlier this year.

Horn began mailing care packages to his son after learning of the harsh conditions in which his son was living.

Horn and his wife, who are both retired military, sent as much as they could to let their son share with his unit.

They couldn't handle the demand, so they gave unit contact information to family and friends. Other units heard about the packages and asked to be included.

The project has evolved to the point that Horn's site, www.anysoldier.us, includes a search engine that can be searched by types of items.

Whether you have a bunch of old CDs or DVDs to send or just hit the two-for sale at your local surplus store, there is a unit that needs those things more than any other.

"Some of these guys are living literally in palaces and others are sleeping on the ground," Horn said. "It's the nature of the war that what they need is so different by unit."

Soldiers volunteer to make their address available. Senders write "Attn: Any Soldier" in the return address area, and when the package reaches the soldier, he knows to spread the wealth.

Horn runs the program from home as a sort of second job, and the hours are exhausting. Still, he can't quit when he sees daily comments like this:

"I can't tell you how much my soldiers look forward to mail call every day," Capt. Brett Egusa said yesterday in an e-mail to AnySoldier.mil.

"As we get closer to the holidays, it is starting to sink in that we here in Kandahar will be spending them all together and not with our loved ones. ... Because of all your thoughts and gifts you have sent us, Thanksgiving will be something to enjoy, not to be depressed about."

Spc. Edward Jackson wrote, "Every single item has been put to use. If I can't use the items, there's always someone who can."

They tell Horn the support from those at home has been overwhelming.

"We received enough that we were able to pass some of the stuff onto other sections," wrote Lance Cpl. Raymond W. Stone.

"There are 160 Marines in my whole unit, so I tried to spread the wealth to a bunch of the other guys who didn't get boxes. The letters and cards really brighten up our area. Thank you all so much for the support."



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