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## Beach Balls, Puzzles, Letters and Such Keep Laboratory, Local Community and Soldiers in Touch

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Joyce McDonald and her co-workers at Adelphi Laboratory Center Procurement Office gather around a conference table full of items requested by soldiers in Iraq. Seated (from left) Christi Winkler; Donna Sheely; Terry Foley; Kathy Harrigan. Standing (from left) Jeannine Wheeler; Robin Stoltz; Joyce McDonald and George Gasch.

ADELPHI, MD -- Joyce McDonald, a procurement analyst at the Adelphi Laboratory Center has a son, Michael Stephen McDonald, Jr., 21, serving with the 362nd Military Police Detachment in Iraq. Michael enjoys receiving mail and shares it with his buddies because many of them don't receive mail from their families or from anyone in their hometown.

When she learned this, Joyce asked Michael to let her know if someone over there would like to receive mail or how she could help to keep up their morale and spirits when not on patrol. "I decided to help in any way I could," Joyce said. What began as one woman sharing a little caring from home soon became a community project as neighbors in the Beltsville, Md. community joined Joyce and her office co-workers.

Joyce's co-workers and neighbors knowing about Michael and caring that someone they actually knew was over there in harm's way, offered to bake cookies and brownies to send to Michael. But, according to Joyce, one guy can only eat so much and he shared the extras with his friends. Joyce then talked with the people in her office and they decided to write and send packages directly to any soldiers interested in being in touch with someone back in the states.

Joyce came across a website, [anysoldier.com](http://anysoldier.com) that lists names and addresses of soldiers in Iraq, and other troubled places around the world, who want to have personal contact with someone from home.

To make life more tolerable for those serving in Iraq, Joyce explained, "It's just a matter of going on the website and looking for the name of someone and matching it with something they can use or enjoy when not on patrol."

Joyce enthusiastically encourages others at ALC to send requested items: beach balls, puzzles, letters and such. Joyce, her family, neighbors and office co-workers gather the items requested by our soldiers. Crossword puzzles or something as simple as a newspaper or inflatable beach balls that they can toss around to each other in the sand, which they have plenty of outside the cities in Iraq, is all that may be necessary to let a soldier know you care. Once Joyce even sent some toys: yoyos, airplanes, small balls and sock puppets to the MPs in a war zone in Iraq.

"If someone donates books and magazines that they've finished reading, simply go on the web and find a soldier who has requested that item. A recurring request from several soldiers is for personal hygiene type items. A woman in the community, who works for a hotel company in the area, donated miniature soaps, shampoos and the like. Checking on [anysoldier.com](http://anysoldier.com) we chose one such request and sent a package to them," Joyce said. "The gift was greatly appreciated.

"We can never forget they are in harm's way. It's our way of supporting our troops. It helps them alleviate their stress. Writing a letter, sending the Sunday comics or a sports magazine is an easy way to show our gratitude for what they endure in combat. My son Michael writes that he and his buddies are often under mortar attacks that land near where he works and sleeps. He sent photos of cars and equipment that was destroyed because of surprise attacks by insurgents", she continued. One of the photos shows an off-duty MP in the foreground relaxing by joking around with sock puppets.

After receiving letters and gifts, the troops write back. Many of the notes are just simple "thank you." One currently circulating in Joyce's procurement office is from a female soldier, a supply mail clerk, who recently received the items she requested for the unit she distributes mail to in Afghanistan.

"Dear Contracting Office,  
20 Sep 04

Hello, my name is SPC Well, Robin. I received the four packages that your office sent to A/1-62 ADA. On behalf of my fellow soldiers, thank you very much for all your support. I sent two of the packages to the guys of 1st Platoon in Tarin Kowt, and the other two to 2nd Platoon in Organi. I'm sure they will enjoy and appreciate what you sent.

Take care & keep in touch.

Sincerely,  
SPC Well, Robin”

Another thank you note was sent from a soldier living in a tent in a remote village in Iraq:

“I would personally like to thank all of those who have recently contributed their time and efforts in what I believe to be an awe-inspiring and frankly quite dramatic display of support from the home-front. The correspondence and care packages have been coming in at an overwhelming and nearly monumental pace. The ‘Any Soldier’ campaign has seen tears from some, given hope to most, and has been inspirational to us all. Your relentless support has provided the simple reminder that any one of us would proudly die for a grateful nation in our ongoing fight against terrorism.”

‘Freedom is not Free’  
Sgt Brian Horn”

Joyce recommends that anyone who wants to help out in some way can take a look at the website, anysoldier.com, and send a couple letters. If they have items, gifts and things, but don’t know how to ship them, she and her committed office mates will see that they are shipped to any soldier requesting contact with home. Joyce can be reached at [jmcdonald@arl.army.mil](mailto:jmcdonald@arl.army.mil) or contact Stephany Jaramillo at the U.S. Army Research Laboratory Public Affairs Office at (301) 394-4295.

This loving care they share with those stationed thousands of miles away came about not only because of a son in Iraq; not only because his mail is eagerly read by his buddies. It all came about because Joyce McDonald, a concerned mom, a Beltsville community resident and an ALC procurement analyst, and her co-workers care.



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