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December 9, 2005

Dear troops: You've got mail!

Woman teams with schools to send 3,000-plus holiday cards and letters to Americans overseas

By Abe Aamidor
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Central Indiana will feel a little closer to Iraq and Afghanistan this holiday season, thanks in part to Bekki Cooper, who has helped local schoolchildren send thousands of Christmas cards and other greetings to American troops overseas.

Cooper, a 46-year-old homemaker on the Northeastside and a part-time administrative assistant for a house painting company, began Operation Christmas Cheer just before Thanksgiving.

- Dear troops:
You've got mail!



zoom

SPECIAL THANKS: Cathedral sophomore Nate O'Connor addressed his letter to any soldier, although his brother also is serving overseas. "I put in a P.S. to say 'Hi' to my brother in case you see him." - MATT DETRICH / The Star

HOW TO HELP

Folks can learn how to help other American soldiers, sailors or Marines by visiting www.anysoldier.com on the Internet.

program.

Besides Operation Christmas Cheer, Cooper has helped administer a "Valentines for Vets" program the past 13 years at Roudebush Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and she's been in e-mail contact with some soldiers currently overseas.

"They're requesting 'Bob and Tom' CDs," she noted. "Bob and Tom are known from coast to coast."

Call Star reporter Abe Aamidor at (317) 444-6472.

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"You feel for them," said Cooper. "They're taking time out of their lives and they're away from their families to risk their lives for our freedom."

Cooper will ship the last of more than 3,000 cards and letters to overseas military post offices today, the last day to ensure a Christmas arrival. She collected greetings from about a dozen area schools, including Cathedral High School.

Nate O'Connor, a 15-year-old Cathedral sophomore, says his older brother, Michael, a Cathedral alumnus, is serving overseas. Michael had been stationed with the Army at Fort Hood, Texas, but Nate addressed his letter to any soldier.

"I put in a P.S. to say 'Hi' to my brother in case you see him," said Nate.

Many of the cards and letters, from children as young as 9 and 10, are precious.

One child wrote, "Thank you for being in the military, fighting for our country. Have a happy holiday. Also, blend in with the snow."

And Bekki Cooper's son, Christopher Cooper, is writing to a young soldier also named Chris Cooper.

Most of the cards are hand-made, and Bekki Cooper says several area businesses helped defray the postage cost. Most schools she contacted agreed to participate in the

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