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Community News

Web sites offer opportunities to support overseas troops

November 15, 2006

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As Americans celebrated Veterans Day, Saturday, Nov. 11, there was a renewed call for support for troops stationed overseas fighting the "War on Terror." Two Web sites offer people the opportunity to do just that, anysoldier.com and operationbabyblanket.com.

The Web site anysoldier.com started as a simple family effort to help Army Sergeant Brian Horn, who was one of the 1,000 soldiers who parachuted into Northern Iraq on March 26, 2003. His family knew that his unit, the 173rd Airborne Brigade was living under very rough conditions, and sent Brian care packages as often as they could.

The family wanted to help the other soldiers who were with Horn, so his father, Marty Horn-himself a 20-year Army veteran-started the Web site on Aug. 26, 2003, and asked friends and neighbors to help send their support.

The idea caught on fast. The support was massive during the holidays that year, and many requests came to support other military units. On Jan. 1st, 2004, the program began to do just that.

At the time, the group projected that they would have 50 volunteer contact soldiers by Christmas. They were wrong, as by June 2, 2004, they had their first 100 volunteers, and three days short of a year they had 1,000. As of now, anysoldier.com has 3,915 volunteers.

"Any Soldier Inc.," became a non-profit corporation registered in the state of Maryland on June 2004. Their application for non-profit charitable, 501(c)(3) status, was submitted to the IRS and approved on Aug. 3, 2004. In August 2005, the domain names AnyAirman.com, AnyMarine.com, AnySailor.com, and AnyCoastGuardman.com were acquired, and work started on offering five service-specific versions of the Web site.

Anysoldier.com matches concerned civilians with soldiers serving overseas. Once a person decides to get involved with anysoldier.com, they are encouraged to visit the Web site and click on the "Where to Send" button to pick a serviceman/servicewoman to sponsor. Then, users are encouraged to click on the "What to Send" button in order to send the most-needed and most-beneficial items-and also to avoid sending items that are prohibited and/or illegal. There is also an option to just send a soldier any number of pre-packaged care packages.

Operationbabyblanket.com is a similar effort, but is designed to support a soldier's family while they are away from home. The Web site specializes in offering support to the pregnant wives of deployed servicemen.

There are three different ways to support soldiers' families through operationbabyblanket.com. The first is to sponsor a mother. Sponsors are women who agree to "adopt a mommy." Sponsors come in all shapes and sizes: military members, military wives, civilians, and everyone in between. When supporters join, they will be paired up with a mommy, and will become their personal one-on-one supporter.

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A second way to be involved is through mommy packets. This project consists of a hat, blanket, and twelve announcements. They are bundled together with ribbon and sent to stateside base hospitals for wives of deployed servicemen that have yet to join the group. Twenty packets a month are sent to four base hospitals, but the number will increase as more volunteers join the effort. Blankets can be sewn, quilted, crocheted, or knitted. They can be any color (for boy or girl) and can be any size. Hats can be made of any color. Remember babies heads are small, so adjust your pattern accordingly. Announcements are made on regular card stock of neutral colors. The outside of the announcements can be designed with stamps, stickers, ribbon and/or lace, anything with a baby theme. The inside should have a space for: name of baby, weight, length, time, date, and names of parents. This should be stamped in or printed neatly. After making a bundle of twelve, include envelopes and tie with lace, ribbon or yarn. Volunteers can make as many of any part of the packet as they wish, or they can make a complete packet.

The final project is called baby blankets for troops. Baby blankets are made for this project and are sent to expectant dads that are deployed. They, in turn, choose one to send home especially for their own baby. This helps them be involved even though they are thousands of miles away. Three to four blankets are sent per month. Volunteers should attach a note or letter saying who its from and giving the response address if they are wanting to hear from the family.

For more information on either of these efforts, please visit anysoldier.com or operationbabyblanket.com.

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