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# PETER ROWE MISSION: SAN DIEGO

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### Retirement community's care packages deliver materials and a message of support to the troops

UNION-TRIBUNE

October 7, 2007

**CARLSBAD –** The other night, 88-year-old Les Tenney cruised the local 99 Cent Store's aisles. He was hunting for the right items:

Graham crackers.

Microwave popcorn.

Women's black underwear, 15 pair.

“What do you think those people in the 99 Cent Store thought when he came up with all those panties and graham crackers?” laughed Tenney's wife, Betty.

“I don't care what they thought about me,” he shot back.

During World War II, Tenney survived the Bataan Death March and three years as



EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune  
A veteran and former POW, 88-year-old Les Tenney knows what troops want in an overstuffed care package. For example: chili, fruit salad, tortilla chips and a pair or two of black panties.

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prisoner of the Japanese. After that, other people's impressions no longer loomed large on his internal radar screen. Instead, he tends to focus on his mission.

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Since August, that's meant leading more than a dozen La Costa Glen residents in a campaign to send care packages to American soldiers and sailors serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dubbing their outfit "Care Packages From Home," they asked for contributions from their 900-plus neighbors in this affluent retirement community. Bingo: In four days, \$17,000 rolled in.

Then, they scanned the typical 21st century GI's wish list. Bang-o: This ain't your grandpa's military. In the 1940s, even Buck Rogers didn't have the high-tech products today's soldier relies on – CDs, DVDs, those microwaveable popcorn packets. Not to mention certain items coveted by the 26,000 women who make up almost 14 percent of the Americans serving in combat zones.

"Here," Tenney said, cracking open a jar of strawberry-scented salt scrub. "The women love this. Not me, but the women love this."



EDUARDO CONTRERAS / Union-Tribune  
La Costa Glen's "Care Packages From Home" is a hands-on operation. More than a dozen retirees shop for goodies, stuff each box, then print out and carefully apply each address label.

He was standing in La Costa Glen Activities Committee's storage garage, territory that Care Packages From Home more or less commandeered. Walls are lined with shelves – thank you, La Costa Glen Woodworking Committee! – and the shelves drip goodies.

Stacked against the wall are U.S. Post Office boxes, each the size of a TV cable box. Five mornings a week, retirees pack five or six boxes to units that have posted their wants at a Web site, anysoldier.com.

Cpl. Christopher A. Mays, for instance, wrote on behalf of 20 men and two women from Marine Attack Squadron 542, now in Iraq. "We are living out of tents at the moment and would appreciate some soaps, washcloths, Deodorant, things of that nature, also some food that doesn't require cooking, maybe some snack items would be fine."

La Costa Glen's Dan May read that note, grabbed a box and stuffed it like a Thanksgiving turkey. He squeezed in:

- Two cans of chili, no beans
- One can of chicken Vienna

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- One can of foot powder
- One bottle of body lotion
- Two sticks of deodorant
- Two bowls of fruit salad
- Two tubes of shaving cream
- Two panty liners
- 16 tampons
- Three packages of beef jerky
- One pack of tuna salad and crackers
- One pack of chicken salad and crackers
- Two bags of tortilla chips with cheese dip
- Two packs of body wipes
- Two bars of soap
- Two containers of floss
- Three sleeves of cheddar cheese crackers
- Four bags of cookies
- Two trial-size bottles of mouthwash
- Three disposable razors
- One tube of toothpaste
- One toothbrush

There's also a letter that reads, in part, "This box packed by a proud American who cares." Signed, "Dan."

### WHAT THEY CAN USE

- Christmas packages are sent wrapped and contain such items as new socks, portable CD players, CDs, stationery, hand-held electronic games, Christmas decorations, books, hair accessories for women, phone cards.

- All year round, send nonperishable food, clothing, personal care items, eye drops, baby wipes, socks, unscented soap, individual toiletry items, Handi Wipes, letters and cards, powdered drink mixes, magazines, puzzles, toys to pass out to the kids.

- Other suggestions: instant cups of soup, instant coffee, tea bags, cocoa, and packs of tuna or chicken. Prepackaged items include cereal bars, granola bars, sunflower seeds, nuts, cookies, crackers, beef jerky, Slim Jims, pretzels, hard candy, Tootsie Pops, Pop-Tarts, fruit snacks, fruit roll-ups, dried fruit, instant lunches and oatmeal. Packages of powdered iced tea, Kool-Aid and Gatorade are needed.

- Don't send perishable food, and avoid sending chocolate because of heat.

Suggestions provided by the AdoptA Soldier program in Wilton, N.Y., and Military Mom in Action in Melrose, N.Y.

### WHAT'S PROHIBITED

The following are prohibited in the region of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

- Obscene articles (prints, paintings, cards, films, videotapes, etc.), including any matter depicting nude or semi-nude persons, pornographic or sexual items, or nonauthorized political materials.

- Bulk quantities of religious materials contrary to the Islamic faith. Items for the personal use of the addressee are permissible.

- Pork or pork byproducts.

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The entire box can't weigh more than 12 pounds, but veterans say these small items have a big impact. Back in July, Tenney was chatting with his nephew, retired Marine Seymour "Si" Tenenberg of San Luis Obispo. Tenenberg mentioned that he'd just sent his 1,100th box to soldiers and sailors overseas.

"I never received a box" as a POW, Tenney said. "I couldn't have, but I just imagined how excited I would have been to receive a box. Then I thought, 'I bet we could be able to do something like that here.'"

At La Costa Glen, where almost 25 percent of residents are retired military, that's a safe bet. But the impulse to send a touch of home to Americans abroad is not limited to veterans. Care packages have been sent by North San Diego County Harley Owners Group, Contemporary Women of North County and other bands of civilians.

At La Costa Glen, these volunteers haven't been on active duty in decades. Bob Collins, for instance, left the Army after a stint in postwar Japan and became vice president for engineering at United Airlines. These days, he takes oxygen through a tube and gets around in an electric scooter, but that doesn't stop him from acting as Care Packages From Home's treasurer.

Phil Strick, the vice chair, is a former Navy pilot and an insurance executive. He's 87, a year younger than chairman Tenney, who's the walking definition of "spry."

"Here's a guy who was a POW and he's 88 years old and he's giving back to the community," said Richard Williams of the Marine Corps League of San Diego. "It's amazing."

location) and FPO (military aboard ships), call (800) ASK-USPS, consult your local post office, or phone the Military Postal Service Agency at (800) 810-6098.

*Source: United States Postal Service Web site at USPS.com*

#### MAILING DETAILS

- The USPS will supply free packaging boxes for priority mail. Packages are normally shipped in either the No. 7 box, which is 12 inches by 12 inches by 8 inches deep, or the flat rate No. 1 box, which has a 20-pound maximum for international shipments. The flat-rate box is 11 inches by 8.5 inches by 5.5 inches.
- The contents of the flat-rate box must be neatly contained inside the box with adhesive packaging tape.
- Sending the standard No. 7 box priority mail anywhere overseas is \$9.50. The flat rate for the No. 1 box is \$7.
- All military packages should be postmarked by the first week of December to ensure Christmas delivery.

- NYT NEWS SERVICE

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Disturbed that that Care Packages From Home lacked nonprofit status, Tenney approached the League. Now, he asks would-be benefactors to write checks to "Marine Corps League-Care Packages From Home." That way, the donations are tax-deductible.

Another nimble move from a smooth operator. You know that cliché about senior citizens resisting change? Watch Tenney in his study, dreaming up new ways to accomplish his mission.

"Look," he says, pointing to his computer screen. At anysoldier.com, there's a letter from a Marine noncom in Iraq. The sergeant's name is Jessica and she wants wax strips so she and her fellow female Leathernecks can remove the hair from their legs.

"We'll go out and buy it," Tenney said. "They deserve it. That's something that will make them feel like a woman again."

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