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News

Story of giving

By JOHN RICHMEIER, Times Staff Writer

It's already been about a month since Christmas, but it doesn't have to be Dec. 25 for Barbara Schroeder to be in a gift giving mood.

This week, the Leavenworth woman plans to mail 50 packages to soldiers in Iraq.

And she's hoping donations can help her send more in the future.

"As long as the war is going, I'll keep trying," Schroeder said.

Schroeder said she started Packages from the Heartland because she's a proud American.

"(The soldiers) don't have the things we have," she said. "It's important to make them as happy as possible."

Schroeder said she's also doing it to support her son, Jason, who's in the Army. If the war continues, it's likely her son will be sent to Iraq next December.

She said she's not thrilled about her son going to Iraq, "but he's proud to serve his country."

Schroeder began sending packages last year to soldiers, paying for the cost out of her own pocket. But that got to be expensive.

This time around, she still has paid for some things, but word of mouth also led to donations.

"I think I've got a pretty good start at it," she said.

Schroeder said she has a friend in California, and they're working to send as many packages as they can.

Schroeder has set up a Packages from the Heartland account in a local bank for monetary donations. Anyone wishing to donate items can contact her.

She said military personnel in Iraq have asked for donations of such items as snacks, playing cards and disposable cameras.

"Personal hygiene products are the big thing," she said.

She also said military personnel have electronic items such as DVD players from the United States, but can't use them in Iraq without adapters.

Schroeder said there are tons of Internet sites that can be used to obtain names and addresses of military personnel in Iraq. She uses anysoldier.com.

Even though a package may be addressed to one person, items get dispersed to a number of people. So 50 packages may end up helping 200 people, Schroeder said.

Last year, she sent packages to people in the 101st Airborne Division. She said she has a friend with a husband in the division.

This time, she's sending packages to people in the 82nd Airborne. Her son is serving in that division.

Schroeder also has a soldier referral list so people can submit names of addresses of military personnel they want to receive packages. She said the names of the people placed on the form don't have to be in the Army.

"It could be Marines, any branch of the service," she said.

In addition to packages, Schroeder has sent letters to soldiers.

"There's some soldiers that never get any mail," she said.

Schroeder said she previously paid for packages according to how much they weigh, which she said was a little pricey. This time, she has purchased boxes from the U.S. Postal Service over the Internet. Each box, no matter the weight, will cost \$7.70 to ship.

She also ordered the necessary customs forms.

"You have to fill out a form for each box," she said.

Schroeder estimated that it would take a couple of days to pack all 50 boxes.

For more information, she can be reached at 651-5339.

For monetary donations, checks can be made payable to Packages from the Heartland and sent to Commerce Bank, 2830 S. Fourth St.

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