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Local doctor continues package drive for overseas soldiers

By Heidi E. Ruckno, Staff Writer

11/21/2005

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For many soldiers in combat, mail call is often the best part of the day.

But for those who don't get mail, it can be the loneliest part of the day. A Kingston psychiatrist hopes to make it so that every soldier hears his or her name at mail call.

For the past year, Dr. Matthew Berger and his wife, Susan, have been sending packages to soldiers not receiving mail.

What started as a small goodwill gesture has now expanded into a large-scale package drive, as word spread to patients, colleagues and associates.

So far, the Bergers have sent over 50 packages to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We've been doing this for a while. We intend to continue to do it," Berger said. "We're going to do this as long as they're over there."

Berger pays for all the postage himself, a practice he will continue as long as there are items to send. Sgt. John Paul Karpovich of the 109th Field Artillery said postage on a heavier package can cost upwards of \$10.

Anyone wishing to participate in the drive can drop items off at Berger's office, 225 Tioga Ave., Kingston, during regular business hours.

The Bergers use the Web site www.AnySoldier.com to seek out soldiers in the field who need attention.

The AnySoldier Web site, headquartered in LaPlata, Md., was started two years ago by Sgt. Brian Horn, who wanted to do something to increase the morale of his unit. His father Marty Horn, a Vietnam War veteran, now runs the site, which has grown to support over 97,000 troops.

"The people on our site are called contacts. They're acting for the folks around them," Marty Horn said. "The crux of our organization is to help the folks who aren't getting support."

The Web site's volunteers post messages whenever they can to let the public know what their units want and need. They provide an address where the items can be sent, and wait for the mail to arrive.

"I think the American public and the world in general would be surprised to learn how little support the troops get when they're in the field," Marty Horn said.

Berger was surprised to learn soldiers needed things he thought would be provided, such as soaps, hand sanitizers, deodorant and other toiletries.

While those items are important, Berger said high-tech items, such as video games and DVDs, also get a warm reception.

Berger also sends a lot of international phone cards, so the soldiers can call home if they need to.

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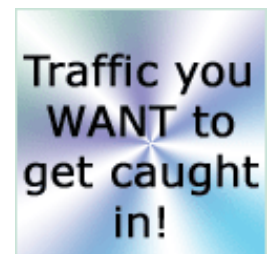
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