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Local News

Golf in Iraq, a continuing giving saga

By John Heubach

Guest Columnist

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I knew I was face to face with someone special when he was standing at my counter wanting to ship some golf clubs, tees and balls to a buddy serving in Iraq.

Dan Sundt, a welder for Ziegler Corp., was a complete stranger. It was his enthusiasm and generosity in trying to help an American serviceman serving in a hostile war-torn country far from home that really impressed me.

There is an invisible bond among veterans, a kind of brotherhood that dissolves all differences. As a Vietnam veteran who has worked more than 20 years at Federal Express, I immediately wanted to help.

Golf clubs are heavy and international shipping is costly. I quickly considered using my employee discount to offset the cost, but I needed to check with my manager first.

Good news: her heart, like mine, was touched by Dan's act of kindness. Several of my co-workers also helped Dan package and fill out international paperwork.

It was almost Thanksgiving, and we all had a lot to be thankful for. Freedom isn't free.

Over the next weeks, Dan spread the word, and more clubs and balls started coming in. FedEx sent out the second shipment, and Dan had still more equipment to share.

My church, Calvary Lutheran of Golden Valley, maintains a list of military individuals on a prayer list, among them the son of one of our pastors. I contacted Pastor Skip Reeves and told him about the project, and he provided some names. We sent shipment No. 3.

Meanwhile, Dan received a postcard back from his friend in Iraq. You wouldn't believe how a couple of clubs and balls cheered the guys up.

The more we spread the word, the more people wanted to donate. Not just golf clubs and balls. People were asking if we wanted other stuff. And why not?

Soon we had softballs, bats, gloves, baseballs, footballs, soccer and basketballs, tennis balls and racquets, and even hockey pucks!

I personally heard from people from all over. Some kind folks in Chicago sent checks to help defray our expenses. The church offered to temporarily store some of the equipment, since Dan's and my garages were filling up fast. A reporter from the local Sun-Post wrote a great article. The community started to respond.

FedEx sent six more boxes, but we were aware we had to find other sources of funding. Ziegler Corp. started an outreach program and some funding was promised.

Then we got a break. A veteran read the Sun-Post story and gave a copy to his son, Tom Docken, sales manager for Rockler Woodworking and Hardware in Minnetonka. Tom made the generous offer to use his storefront as a drop off/collection point.

ULINE Shipping Supply Specialist from Eagan donated the use of a 48-foot trailer and a very nice check to cover more transportation costs.

My family helped Dan and myself pick up the sporting goods, including golf clubs, tees, and thousands of golf balls. Some items had price tags still on them, some were gently used.

There was one particular football I'll never forget. Written on it were the initials of the sender followed by age 6 and then GO USA.

We are using www.AnySoldier.com to locate troops who have requested sporting goods. The Web site lists more than 3,000 active duty men and women and reservists from every branch of the U. S. military, serving in any of 13 countries, most of them in dangerous zones.

If you know someone in the military who would enjoy a sports break, let us know. You can reach us via email at danielsundt@yahoo.com, or john@heubach.com

We can use new and gently used sporting goods, as well as donations to help defray packing and shipping costs. This is not tax-deductible. It's simply a matter of the heart.

John Heubach is a resident of Golden Valley.

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- Main Office: 952-829-0797 webinfo@mnsun.com -
Created and maintained by [Quantum Digital Interactive](http://QuantumDigitalInteractive.com) jcorbo@quantumsite.com
