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- News
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Living
- Blogs & Opinions
- Photos & Video
- Help

- Jobs
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Commentary

Dale Huffman: Supporting our troops 'takes so little'

Brookville couple's Operation Show Our Love has shipped useful items and letters to 285 units in eight countries since December 2004.

By Dale Huffman

Staff Writer

Cindy and Chris St. John say that when you walk into their Brookville home, it is like entering a military museum.

The St. Johns have flags and memorabilia from front-line American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan on the walls in the entrance hallway.

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And the lower level of the St. John home is a mailing and shipping area for the home-grown project they call Operation Show Our Love.

Cindy, 48, and Chris 45, have been married for 12 years, have no children, and no relatives on active duty, but have "adopted" hundreds of members of the American military serving in several countries.

"It is especially important during the holiday season that those in the military hear from us back home and know that we care," Cindy said. "It takes so little to just let them know we appreciate the service they are doing to protect our



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freedoms."

The two said they wanted to be supportive of troops on active duty, but just didn't know what to do at first.

"Then one of my friends sent me an e-mail and told me about a Web site at www.ansoldier.com," Cindy said. "I went online and I was fascinated. I read letters from those in the military all night and into the morning. I found it was addictive."

Cindy said on the Web site they found addresses for specific military personnel.

"Chris and I started writing to those who were on the site, and before long we were getting tons of reaction; we stockpiled a lot of addresses. The troops sent us lists of things they need, and we got busy, collected items, and mailed them away."

It began with nine packages sent Dec. 9, 2004, and has continued to grow.

Cindy runs a sales business out of their home, and Chris is a security computer administrator for a Miami Valley company. The two spend every spare hour they have writing letters to those in the military and preparing packages to be mailed.

To date they have sent more than 700 care packages to 285 units in eight countries. "We go to the post office at least once a week, with 25 packages or so," Chris said. "We are on a first-name basis with the postal workers."

They have kept records and figure they have sent more than 16,000 pounds of items such as deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, snacks and even toilet paper.

"Whatever is specifically requested by an individual or a commanding officer, we try to find and send," Cindy said.

How is it paid for?

"Well, we paid for postage ourselves at the beginning, but soon we got help," Cindy said. "The local Brookville VFW Post 3288 called one day and asked how they could help in the project. We told them we could use help with the postage, and they sent us \$500 that day. Since then they have been very generous in paying for all the postage."

Schools, church groups and neighbors also have given the St. Johns support.

One of the paybacks, according to the St. Johns, has been the letters from the military men and women who they help.

"I have a notebook filled with cards and letters they have sent," Cindy said. "They need to be told that patriotism is alive and well, especially in the heartland of America where we live. "

So far Cindy and Chris have met 12 soldiers who stopped by to see them when they were home on leave.

"Others have promised to do the same," Cindy said. "Our operation makes us feel good to think that we are touching lives of military people and letting them know we care."

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