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## Pitching in for the troops

By **Stacey Hart**/ Staff Writer

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About 200 letters written by Weston children will soon be making their way to Iraq and Afghanistan after a mother brought up the idea to her daughters' first- and second-grade teachers.

For the last couple of years, Eileen Beaudoin and her husband Andrew, who is stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base, have sent care packages overseas through the Web site AnySoldier.com.

"It's been an ongoing thing. We periodically would send a package over," she said, noting that what is in the package varies, sometimes snacks or hygiene items or just cards.

AnySoldier.com was started in 2003 when Army Sgt. Brian Horn's parents wanted to help him through rough conditions in Northern Iraq by sending care packages. The parents then asked friends and family to send Horn packages for other soldiers in his unit.

"Now they have thousands of contacts for all of the different services, acting as distributors for mail and care packages for people who aren't necessarily getting mail or anything from home," Beaudoin said.

The Web site allows people to request the contact information for soldiers who are willing to accept care packages and then distribute them to their fellow soldiers who do not receive letters or other items.

"So many of them are out in locations where they don't have access to a place where they can get hygiene items, so a lot of times what they're asking for is snack foods, razors, soaps, things you would think they would have that they don't," Beaudoin said.

Earlier this month, Beaudoin was preparing to send another care package, one that would arrive between Veterans Day and Thanksgiving, when she thought about talking to her children's teachers at Woodland School about writing letters to the soldiers.

"You can go on the Web site and read the requests and a lot of them love to hear from children, just as kind of a reminder of why they are over there," she said.

Beaudoin asked her daughters' first- and second-grade teachers if they would be willing to incorporate a letter writing portion into the discussions of Veterans Day. She thought maybe she would get a few letters from each class, knowing it was not something every child would want to do.

The idea quickly spread throughout the school, which goes from kindergarten to third grade. Beaudoin said many of the teachers felt this was a great expression of kindness for the Veterans Day and Thanksgiving holidays.

Despite how many teachers invited their students to write letters to the soldiers, Beaudoin never expected the response she received.

"I got over 200 letters. I was in tears. I was in shock. I expected to get a handful of letters to put in with our little package that we send over and I was just floored. I couldn't believe it. I was just so proud that they did it," she said.

Many of the cards thanked the soldiers for what they were doing and expressed sorrow that they could not be with their families on Thanksgiving, Beaudoin said.

The letters were expected to be placed in care packages put together last week at Hanscom Air Force Base and should be sent out soon, she said.

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Andrew Beaudoin of Weston sorts through the numerous items donated to troops through AnySoldier.com. (Courtesy photo)

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