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EAST SIDE

Support for troops from grass roots

Care packages tell GIs they're not forgotten

By **Patty Machelor**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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Jonathan Rice and some friends at the Atria Bell Court Gardens retirement community are supporting the country's overseas military in a way that goes beyond yellow ribbons and bumper stickers.

Since September, they have sent nearly 400 care packages to soldiers in Iraq and Afghani-stan.

Rice said the idea to ship boxes of food and personal items each week sprang up late last summer after a discussion in which one staff member told RICE she supports the troops but not the war.

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"I said, 'How do you support the troops?' It got my dander up," Rice said.

Afterward, Rice said he decided it was time to do something regularly for the men and women stationed overseas.

Focusing mostly on Arizona's troops, Rice and fellow residents Pat Korb and Rosemary Smith set up a donation box in the Atria Bell mail room.

Now, Rice and several others locate soldiers through a Web site, www.anysoldier.com, and buy them nonperishable foods and personal items such as air freshener, foot powder, baby wipes, deodorant and soap.

www.anysoldier.com, and buy them nonperishable foods and personal items such as air freshener, foot powder, baby wipes, deodorant and soap.

"It makes me feel like I'm doing something useful by helping with this," said Korb.

Words of thanks arrive weekly by letter or e-mail.

"A few of my guys are new fathers and new husbands," wrote one female soldier in a letter to Rice. "Every little reminder of home brings a smile to their face."

Another soldier wrote: "The things you send help us remember we are not forgotten."

Rice said they collect an average of \$100 each week and then shop on Fridays at the 99 Cents Only Store, 7117 E. Golf Links Road.

Atria Bell Court, at 6653 E. Carondelet Drive, provides money for shipping, said David Edwards, who directs one of the retirement community's social programs.

"We all thought it was a great idea. We wanted to be part of it from the get-go," Edwards said.

Rice said having help with shipping costs is "an enormous advantage" to the effort. "Now every dollar can go to soldier stuff," he said.

And he said the generosity doesn't come from just those they know.

One time, Rice said, they didn't have enough money to cover all the items they'd picked out and a person in line behind them handed over \$20.

Smith said volunteering her time helps her accept that her 20-year-old nephew is preparing for deployment.

"When it gets that close to your heart, what else do you have to turn to? Just prayer," she said.

Two other women, Corrine Selinger and Lela Bauman, also regularly join in the effort.

"Corrine is our Number One bag lady," Rice said, explaining she often finds good bargains at different stores around town. Recently she came across a great sale on teddy bears.

Selinger said she purchased the bears thinking that if there were children where the

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Lela Bauman and Jonathan Rice shop for GIs at the 99 Cents Only Store at 7117 E. Golf Links Road. Words of thanks from troops in Iraq and Afghanistan arrive weekly by letter or e-mail.

A.E. Araiza / Arizona Daily Star

Want to make a donation?

Send checks to Sujin Stone, Atria Bell Court, 6653 E. Carondelet Drive, Tucson, AZ 85710.

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soldiers were stationed, they could hand out the bears.

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After the bears were sent over, Selinger said a female soldier wrote and said she sleeps with the teddy bear at her side each night.

Bauman served in the Navy during World War II at a hospital in Long Beach, Calif.

"This is just something that I want to do," she said. "I cannot begin to feel what they are feeling out there."

Since September, two military representatives have visited the Atria Bell residents to thank them for their support and to tell them how much the care packages mean to the soldiers.

"Basically what we do is supply the 7-Eleven stuff," Rice said. "It's the little things that make life bearable."

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- Contact reporter Patty Machelor at 235-0308 or pmachelor@azstarnet.com.



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