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The Record

Monday, December 17, 2007

By **NICK CLUNN**
STAFF WRITER

An American Legion group that has been sending care packages to soldiers in Iraq says overseas postage has drained its bank account, and questions why the Postal Service isn't providing discounted rates to non-profits trying to help the troops.



DON SMITH / THE RECORD

▲ Members of the auxiliary of American Legion Post 67 in East Rutherford preparing care packages for the troops in Iraq. From left, Gerry Popejoy, Marilyn Kunz, Debby Kurczakowski, Donna Oddo and Karen Greco.

"We're a small unit and we depend on donations," said Donna Oddo, president of the auxiliary of American Legion Post 67 in East Rutherford. "Even if there was a discount, it would help a lot."

After auxiliary members last month again dipped into their own pockets to pay for shipping, the women decided they had likely sent their last cardboard box to Iraq.

George Flood, a spokesman for the U.S. Postal Service, said discounted postage is not possible because the organization receives no taxpayer money and sustains itself solely on postal fees.

The "last package" was addressed to Miranda Glover, an Army soldier who had posted her address and wish list on anysoldier.com. The Web site is meant for people who want to help but might not know what to send a soldier.

Twizzlers candy, playing cards and a copy of the Herald News were among the items boxed up for Glover.

Oddo said the group would resume shipments if it received more donations. But its attempts at fund raising, primarily by having requests printed in a weekly newspaper, have fallen flat.

Auxiliary member Marilyn Kunz of Garfield recalled spending \$85 at the post office to ship eight boxes to the Middle East.

Those fees can add up for charity groups, especially smaller ones like the Post 67 auxiliary, that send toiletries, candy and other stateside comforts to the troops in Iraq and

HOW TO HELP

Donations for the auxiliary at American Legion Post 67 can be mailed to the post at 333 Grove St., East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

FAST FACTS

Postage rates for delivery to overseas military installations depend on the address and the package's dimensions and weight. The U.S. Postal Service recommends its flat-rate boxes for senders interested in saving money.

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Afghanistan.

"There are a lot of units that send packages, but they're bigger," said Oddo, who knows of one American Legion post that mailed MP3 players and televisions halfway around the world.

The coordinators of two popular troop-support programs said there are many ways upstart charity groups can raise money for postage.

"It's just like running a business -- you got to be creative," said Nick Moscolo, who recently spent \$880 in donated money to send 33 boxes to Afghanistan. "Nobody is going to come to your side if you can't bring them to the table."

Moscolo said he first attracted donors by persuading an Army buddy to park a hulking military vehicle in front of his hair salon in Tenafly. He hung a sign from the vehicle announcing that money was needed to send gifts to troops convalescing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.

Now, Moscolo said he doesn't need to ask for money. Strangers write him checks unsolicited and ask when he's next sending packages.

"What happens is that people start to believe in who you are, and what you are doing," he said.

Saying it would be a major expense for the government, Moscolo said he would oppose lower postage rates for everyone sending packages to troops overseas, but would favor discounts for groups with shipping costs of more than \$1,000.

Rod Hirsch, executive director of Operation Shoebox New Jersey in Somerset, a prolific mailer of military care packages, favors discounted rates for non-profit organizations.



Not that Hirsch's group needs government assistance. Last month, Operation Shoebox spent \$6,000 in donated money to send 1,700 boxes to Iraq and Afghanistan. Hirsch quit his day job in January and began working at Operation Shoebox full time.

For the ladies at Post 67 and groups in the same position, Hirsch recommended starting a Web site and recruiting other service groups to help collect donations.

"There's a whole community of volunteers out there," he said.

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Packages from Hackensack (07601) to Camp Taji, Iraq (APO AE 09378)

Flat-rate box:

• 11x8.5x5.5 inches or 13.625x11.875x3.375 inches, up to 20 pounds
\$8.95

• 16x16x16 inches
25 pounds
\$9.96 (for 5-14 day delivery)

• 24x24x24 inches
35 pounds
\$41.78 (for 5-14 day delivery)

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