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Thursday, February 21, 2008
By Jon Westman
City Green West North Side Walnut
School News Wire Pittsburgh 250

Whitehall seeks items for soldiers

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Two years ago, Whitehall officials tried to start a program similar to one in Brentwood that, since 2004, has provided a variety of items for military personnel from the community serving in Afghanistan and Iraq.

That effort failed, but the cause was not abandoned.

Now through Memorial Day, the borough's Diamond Outreach, consisting of representatives of borough council, the recreation board, the library and the Friends of the Library, will join a nationwide support program called the Any Soldier Campaign to collect food, nonfood and personal hygiene items that will be distributed to military members.

Letters of support, including cards and drawings from children, are among the most requested items. School supplies also are sought to be given to school children there. The campaign, started in 2003 by a Maryland sergeant stationed in Iraq, designates certain recipients for the supplies who will then distribute them to other military personnel.

"It's a great way for the community to show [its] support for our troops," said Councilwoman Linda Book, adding that the program was initiated as part of this year's fifth annual Memorial Day Commemoration ceremony.

Marilyn Pfaff, a member of the Friends of the Library and Diamond Outreach, suggested the project. She is an employee in the corporate communications department of UPMC, which conducted a drive last fall that sent more than 300 boxes of supplies to the troops.

"It was a very successful project and was a personally rewarding experience," she said. She has continued to correspond with and send items to individual soldiers in Iraq and was overwhelmed when she received an antique, hand-carved jewelry box from a 21-year-old Iraqi translator in Kirkuk, who also had received items from her.

Information about the program and a list of items to be collected will be posted in the library where a collection box will be located. Information will also be on the borough and library Web sites, and it will be listed in the borough's spring bulletin. Residents can learn more about the effort by visiting www.anysoldier.com.

Money to purchase items and cover shipping costs is also being accepted. Checks can be made out to the Whitehall Diamond Outreach and marked "Attn: Any Soldier Campaign."

Ms. Book said that volunteers, including local teens, will package the items for mailing this spring.

"We are very excited about this venture and are hoping to receive a good response from our residents," she said.

Jim McMahon is a freelance writer.

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