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News**Care package effort mushrooms into larger outpouring**

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It started innocently enough, as Eastern New Mexico University senior Lisa Hunter was just putting together a care package for a friend in Iraq a few weeks ago.

"We were trading e-mails," Hunter said, "and he told me there were guys in his company that didn't ever get anything."

With a little more online browsing and a lot of legwork, Hunter's gesture for one friend has expanded into an endeavor for nearly 100 men and women stationed in Iraq during the holiday season.

Saturday afternoon saw Hunter, a resident assistant at Bernalillo Hall, and three other ENMU students putting together packages in response to the anysoldier.com Web site.

A lobby on the third floor of Bernalillo Hall was filled with boxes of various items — travel-sized soaps, colognes, and razors with the packaging clipped so more items could fit in small shipping boxes.

The items, Hunter said, were easily acquired through university organizations that have leftover care packages.

Those packages include complimentary items that merchants send for promotional purposes. When Hunter was looking online at anysoldier.com, she noticed that many of the soldiers were requesting those very items.

"They want it, and we have it to give," Hunter said. "That never happens."



*PNT Photo: Kevin Wilson
 Lisa Hunter (left) talks to Kayla Britain about what needs to be packed in boxes for soldiers in Iraq.*

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A few other items have been purchased by Hunter and Whitney Hobson, a fellow RA in Bernalillo.

“It just gives you a really good feeling,” Hobson said. “It’s fun when you go shopping. I think about what I would want if I was there.

“The big thing is thinking of the kind of things we take for granted. Even the things we never buy, we still have access to them.”

Residents at the all-female residence hall have also taken part by sending along magazines, writing letters and cookies with messages in frosting — even though homemade items are generally a bad item to send when delivery can take weeks.

Another big item the group pointed out was a Christmas card. ENMU junior George Youngdahl wrote out a Christmas card and said it didn’t matter that he didn’t know and probably never would know its recipient.

“I don’t think it matters,” Youngdahl said. “I think most people will appreciate a Christmas card, no matter what you send.”

Freshman Kayla Britain, who was helping pack items, admitted that she didn’t know anybody serving in Iraq, but the endeavor still seemed like the right thing to do.

“It’s something God would want everybody to do,” Britain said. “Like Lisa said, this may be our only chance to help (soldiers in Iraq).”

Saturday was the last day that packages could be shipped for guaranteed Christmas delivery to Iraq, but the volume of items still to be shipped means the project will extend into next semester.

“What we’re planning on doing,” Hunter said, “is adopting a new company once a week until we run out.”

The group said they were overwhelmed with how organizations gave them small items to make the packages. Now they’re being overwhelmed by the costs.

Each package, which includes various items, costs Hunter \$7.70 to ship as part of the U.S. Postal Services’ Priority Mail bulk packaging. Currently the group only has enough money right now to send 30 of the packages.

Several organizations have already donated, including the Bernalillo Hall council and the Portales chapter of Kiwanis. Hunter said she is still scheduling meetings with local organizations who could help with postage, and anybody willing to help can contact her at 693-1380 or hunter_lisa59@hotmail.com. Hunter also suggested people could do a similar gesture independently through anysoldier.com.

“If I send a little bit,” Hunter said, “somebody else will send a little bit and they’ll get everything they need.”

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