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Rotary Club aids troops overseas with blank Christmas cards

By Jennifer Shrader - Staff writer

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The LaGrange Rotary Club has sent 3,000 blank Christmas cards to troops overseas, but it's not an effort to be mean.

Soldiers may use the cards to send notes back to their own friends and family.

"They can send them home to their mom or dad or their wife," said Paul French, local Rotary member and brainchild of the project.

The local Rotarians funded the cards partly through a grant from Rotary International in Chicago. They also took their own donations and did their own fundraising.

"We had a box at every table and we asked for donations," French said. "That we raised enough money to send that many cards is something to be proud of."

French and the Rotarians have sent information to other Rotary clubs on how to send cards overseas.

"The vast majority of Rotary clubs have launched their own program," French said.

The cards were sent to members of Georgia units stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. French found the units through the Web site, www.AnySoldier.com, a project he's supported for the last three years. Now 81, he calls himself a "veteran of underage military service," enlisting in



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1942 at the age of 16.

"I remember the first Christmas I was in the military I didn't get any cards or letters," French said.

He was researching a script for his video production company three years ago when he happened upon the Web site, which matches those who want to write letters with soldiers overseas. He was so touched by it that he produced a DVD, "Tango Mike," to promote it, which has won seven national awards.

"Tango Mike" is military-speak for "thanks much."

Other Rotary members are quick to give credit for the card project to French.

"The idea was totally Paul French's, and he enlisted the help and advice of Esther Rainey, Jeff Todd, Charles Sweat and me," Rotary member Clark Johnson said. "As bulletin editor, I offered to send out an advance notice that we would be collecting the money and/or unused Christmas Cards at our next meeting."

The plan came up between the club's normal meeting times, he said, and it moved forward quickly in order to send the cards to the soldiers in time for them to turn around and send them back to their families for Christmas.

"I worked with Paul to figure the best way to mail the cards but after that, Charles Sweat and Paul French handled the rest," Johnson said. "Paul brought boxes for every table at the Rotary meeting to collect the money and cards and thought they would do it the next Wednesday too, but the generous response from the club brought in plenty of cards and money to complete the project that first day. Paul has really been an inspiration in getting people to write to our troops, especially those who do not receive much mail."

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