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Local News

Soldier's mom in Shelbyville takes pride in military package project

By HUEY FREEMAN - H&R Staff Writer

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SHELBYVILLE - When Pat Garlick heard that many of the young people serving in Iraq receive no mail from home, she decided to take action.

Since June, she has sent 60 boxes filled with DVDs, snacks, books, games and socks to troops overseas.

"I really got the idea when I talked to my son one day," Garlick said during an interview in her home.

The house has many signs a Marine lives here, including a Marine Corps welcome mat, a U.S. flag that flies on a pole 24 hours a day and a pine tree with about 170 yellow ribbons on it.

Garlick's son, Marine Lance Cpl. Evan Garlick, 19, with the 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, has been in Iraq since March. He joined when he was 17 years old, after finishing high school in three and a half years.

Evan Garlick graduated from boot camp, at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, the day before he graduated with his class at Shelbyville High School, decked out in his dress blue uniform.

"His dream was to be a Marine. Since he was in high school, he talked about it a lot," Garlick said. "At first, I was against it. Then I thought: I didn't pick my other two kids' careers. Why should I pick his?"

After reaching Iraq in March, Evan Garlick told his mother that some of the Marines he knew were not receiving anything from home.

"It broke my heart," Garlick recalled. "I thought: I can do something to help the guys out."

As she was driving to work, she thought of the name for an organization she would form to bring packages to many soldiers: Pride Packages. She thinks the name was divinely inspired.

"You could say the Lord gave it to me," said Garlick, wife of the Rev. Eric Garlick, pastor of Hindsboro United Methodist Church.

Garlick has been busy since then, finding names of service members from all branches through a Web site, organizing donations she receives from businesses and individuals and shopping for items. She also writes personal notes to each service member.

Her porch is crammed with boxes of Ramen noodles, writing tablets, toothpaste and Frisbees, among other things. Her dining room table is covered with Postal Service flat rate boxes - \$7.70 postage will take them to any military address - some of which are stuffed and ready to go.

"It makes me feel good every time I pack one, that I'm bringing a smile to someone's face," Garlick said.

She sends about three-fourths of the packages to Iraq, the rest to Afghanistan.

Garlick said one female soldier who posted a message on the Web site she frequents, anysoldier.com, particularly touched her heart. She said family members told her they were too busy to send anything to her.

"A lot of them don't have family support," Garlick said. "You've got to have family support in this."

Garlick said she has plenty of family support for her efforts. Pride Packages are filled with the help of Evan's siblings, Ryan

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and Rachel, along with Ryan's wife, Angie, and Rachel's boyfriend, Curt Stewardson.

Marty Horn, who built and maintains the anysoldier Web site, said it is not unusual for soldiers to lack support from their own families.

"Most don't get mail," said Horn, a 20-year Army veteran.

Horn founded the Web site, which has helped more than 211,000 service members, after his son, Sgt. Brian Horn, asked for packages for those who received no mail in Iraq.

Horn said he realizes the importance to morale of receiving mail because of his own experiences serving overseas.

"I know what it's like not to get mail," he said. "If you are away from home, the food stinks, you're uncomfortable, you haven't heard from anyone, then you get a letter from someone. You think that would fix your day? That's what we're all about."

While movies and candy are appreciated, Horn stresses that personal letters are more important. Drawings by children are treasured.

Garlick includes a personal message in every package she sends. She also inserts a copy of The Upper Room, a small devotional magazine. No package is complete until it contains a new pair of socks, something she calls her trademark.

"If they've been wearing the same socks for four to five months, I think a clean, white pair would be awesome," Pat Garlick said.

She said sending parcels to other service members helps take her mind off of Evan, who otherwise consumes her thoughts and prayers.

"I've broken down at work," she said. "I break down and cry, and then they come over and give you a hug and then you're OK. I try to stay strong and positive. I write him every single day since he's left."

Evan Garlick, whose job is driving a light armored vehicle, which has a crew of six Marines, could return home from his tour in Iraq as early as September.

His mother said her faith has sustained her during the past five-and-a-half months.

"When he went over, I decided I would turn my worries over to the Lord," Garlick said. "I'm still at peace about it. I know he's been trained well, and he's with fellow soldiers who've been trained well. I have a good feeling he's going to be OK."

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