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'It's time for some payback'

Lebanon Daily News

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Ex-Army nurse finds it better to give than it ever was to receive

By CHRIS SHOLLY

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Pat Nace's living room is packing central. Strewn around the room are various sizes of Postal Service boxes filled with an assortment of items — magazines, games, stuffed animals and toiletries — headed to Iraq.

The 65-year-old Lebanon woman has sent 125 such boxes to American troops serving in Iraq since July 2005.

"I was a nurse in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969, and a lot of people in this town sent me care packages, so I thought it's time for some payback," she said.

Nace served in the 67th EVAC Unit of the Army in Qui Nohn and Danang, both of which were in the middle of some of the heaviest fighting while she was there.

Nace remembered how important it was to get care packages from home 38 years ago. One local shoe company, now out of business, sent her a large coffee pot.

"That was great because you could put either hot or cold stuff in there," she said. "In the

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hot, hot weather, it was great to have that full of ice-cold lemonade or something."

She also received a box full of transistor radios and batteries.

"For the patients," she said, "so if one of them had a birthday, or one of them was especially depressed or couldn't move around, we'd put some music on for them."

After the Vietnam War, Nace moved to California, where she worked as a nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco and for a forensic anthropologist. She returned to Lebanon two years ago.

Initially, she targeted her care packages just for the women

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soldiers.

"The military still does not get that women need certain things at certain times of the month," she said, adding that some of the women who received her packages thanked her personally when they returned to the States.

Nace gets the names of soldiers and their needs at <http://anysoldier.com>, a Web site operated by a nonprofit group that tells people what soldiers need and where and how to send those packages to the troops.

One commander asked for games, books and magazines, notably TV Guide, so soldiers could read about shows, she said. One soldier asked for stuffed animals to give to Iraqi children. Another is taking care boxes to troops stationed in mountainous regions.

"They don't even have running water most of the time," she said. "No electricity, outhouses, you know, pretty rough."

The retired Nace lives in a small apartment and is on a limited income. To help pay for the postage and items she sends, she held a yard sale every weekend in October.

"I sold all of my jewelry, some books, some stuffed animals, anything I could lay my hands on that I could do without," she said. "I can't think of a better way to spend the money."

It costs between \$8 and \$10 to send the small packages, she said. She estimated she has spent between \$3,000 and \$4,000 to send the packages since she started last year.

Because there was no room at her apartment building on Walnut Street for the yard sales, Nace held them on the side porch of the Higher Grounds Coffee Bar, 925 Cumberland St., where she is a regular patron.

Owner Tony Beck supported her efforts.

"Of course, I said yes," he said. "I had all this room, and there was a lot of traffic from the (Ninth Street Farmers) Market before it closed. Her cause was a pretty decent one."

Beck also has devoted two shelves in his shop for Nace, who is selling books she has collected. The proceeds from the book sale will pay for the packages she sends to troops. In addition, she put a box at the shop to collect sale coupons, which she can use to buy toiletries and other items to put in the boxes. With the coupons, she has saved as much as \$25 on one trip to a drugstore.

Beck said he thinks it's good to remember those who aren't here during this season.

"Just a little thing like that (packages) means so much," he said. "I'm positive a lot of those soldiers are homesick. It's just a little taste of home."

Nace sent her final packages for the year last week. The packages

have to be in the mail by Monday to reach Iraq by Christmas, she explained. She plans to start up again after the holidays.

Nace has a ring she hopes to sell to raise money to pay for next year's packages. Her fiancé gave the ring to her mother, Mary Nace of Sandhill Road, for safe keeping, she said. But he didn't return; he was killed while serving in Vietnam.

"I think he'd approve," she said.

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