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United students fill boxes for U.S. troops

By **Karis Benner/Salem News staff writer**

HANOVERTON - United Local's seventh-grade class donated items for a Friends From Afar project headed by Dianna Rickard, the junior high language arts teacher.

The students donated snacks, hygiene products, reading materials, Visine, and microwaveable foods to box up and send to American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rickard is always sure to include Beanie Babies in these packages as well because of a story she once heard on MSNBC about a church which sent Beanie Babies to a soldier's unit. The unit then handed the Beanie Babies out to the Iraqi children. Days later a young girl holding a Beanie Baby refused to move off the road that an American convoy was traveling down. When approached by the soldiers, the girl pointed out a land mine that would have killed them.

This is the second year that this project has taken place. Rickard started it last year after learning of the website <http://www.anysoldier.com>. This website was started by the mother of a soldier stationed in Iraq and lists the names of thousands of people in the military and their needs. The students then chose soldiers from the list and



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put together boxes of necessities for them. Each of the students also wrote a letter to a soldier expressing their gratitude and sending their wishes for a safe return.

Giant Eagle donated gift cards to the students so they could add more to their boxes.

The VFW Ohio Charities Post 892 has volunteered to pick up the packages and pay for the postage.

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