

Where the customer and the family come first

overseas.

Focusing mostly on Arizona's troops, Rice and fellow residents Pat Korb and Rosemary Smith set up a donation box in the Atria Bell mail room

Now, Rice and several others locate soldiers through a Web site,

www.anysoldier.com, and buy them nonperishable foods and personal items such as air freshener, foot powder, baby wipes, deodorant and soap.

"It makes me feel like I'm doing something useful by helping with this," said Korb.

Words of thanks arrive weekly by letter or e-mail.

"A few of my guys are new fathers and new husbands," wrote one female soldier in a letter to Rice. "Every little reminder of home brings a smile to their face.

Another soldier wrote: "The things you send help us remember we are not forgotten."

Rice said they collect an average of \$100 each week and then shop on Fridays at the 99 Cents Only Store, 7117 E. Golf Links Road.

Atria Bell Court, at 6653 E. Carondelet Drive, provides money for shipping, said David Edwards, who directs one of the retirement community's social programs

"We all thought it was a great idea. We wanted to be part of it from the get-go," Edwards said.

Rice said having help with shipping costs is "an enormous advantage" to the effort. "Now every dollar can go to soldier stuff," he said.

And he said the generosity doesn't come from just those they know.

One time, Rice said, they didn't have enough money to cover all the items they'd picked out and a person in line behind them handed over \$20.

Smith said volunteering her time helps her accept that her 20-year-old nephew is preparing for deployment.

"When it gets that close to your heart, what else do you have to turn to? Just prayer," she said.

Two other women, Corrine Selinger and Lela Bauman, also regularly join in the effort.

"Corrine is our Number One bag lady," Rice said, explaining she often finds good bargains at different stores around town. Recently she came across a great sale on teddy bears.

Selinger said she purchased the bears thinking that if there were children where the



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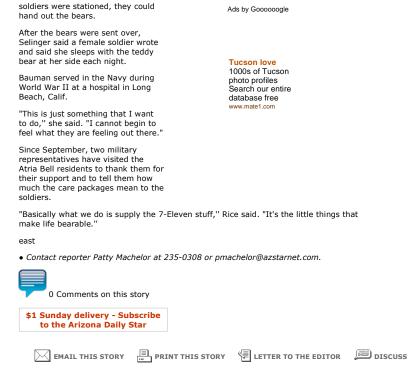
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