



SEQUIM GAZETTE

Your Hometown Newspaper

HOME MULTIMEDIA OBITUARIES OPINION COLUMNISTS CALENDAR CLASSIFIEDS WEATHER CONTACT US LOCAL
LINKS ABOUT US AUDIO

U.S. SOLDIERS SEEK SEQUIM'S HELP



H. Ruth Sandell, a 2005 Sequim High School alumna, is sending care packages to classmate Matt Farris, an. Army Black Hawk helicopter crew chief, left, standing with a fellow soldier in the Middle East. *Photo courtesy H. Ruth Sandell*

Care packages go a long way for fighters across the globe

By Evan McLean
Staff writer

With Veterans Day this weekend and the holidays just around the corner, a college-bound Sequim High School alumna is ready to support a former classmate and his fellow American soldiers in the Middle East.

“We live in a time of controversial war,” H. Ruth Sandell said. “Numbers of U.S. citizens no longer support our presence in the Middle East but it’s still important for us to support our troops who fight to maintain our

national and individual freedoms.”

Sandell has kept in touch with fellow 2005 Sequim High graduate Matt Farris during his time in the Middle East. Farris is an Army crew chief, performing maintenance and manning a machine gun on Black Hawk helicopters used to transport and protect important people around the area, including in Iraq. She said the soldiers need supplies and letters of encouragement.

“Removed from the comforts and familiarities of home, the soldiers in the U.S. military fight to protect the rest of us as we watch ‘Desperate Housewives’ while eating ice cream on the couch,” Sandell said. “This is why I am organizing care packages, not only for Matt, a close friend and hero, but for all his compatriots.”

Sandell is going to school in Northern California but has organized a Sequim-based project to help one of the town’s own soldiers, Farris, and his contingent. She hopes to get the first wave of care packages in the mail by Thanksgiving, Nov. 22.

“I’m in A company, 1-168th out of Boise, Idaho. It used to be hot over here, but now it’s starting to get cold. Yesterday it was in the high 80s,” Farris said in an e-mailed message from the Middle East. “Your barracks start to feel like home and the guys you’re with start to feel like family.”

Because of the comradery, Sandell said it’s a good idea to send more than what one person can eat because the soldiers generally share everything with each other. She also suggested not sending anything perishable or that can melt.

Angie Dickson of Sequim agreed, saying that while chocolate may sound like a nice thing to send to her son Louis Pinnell, it doesn’t work in most Middle East camps.

“It’s still pretty hot over there,” Dickson said.

Army PFC Pinnell, a 2006 graduate of Sequim High School, is stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina with the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne division. After a tour in Contingency Operating Base Speicher near Tikrit, about 100 miles north of Baghdad, Pinnell recently returned to North Carolina. He is scheduled to remain at Fort Bragg for a year and then return to Iraq.

Dickson said her son and fellow soldiers liked simple snacks like granola bars, power bars and beef jerky, along with multivitamins, since few soldiers have access to fruits or vegetables.

Dickson said other popular items are things to help pass long stretches of downtime, like crossword puzzles, yo-yos, playing cards and batteries for electronic devices.

And then there’s staying in touch: Prepaid phone cards can be tricky with country codes, so read the fine print or look into getting a Department of Defense phone card to include in a care package. Dickson said she made sure to buy AT&T phone cards for her son and that they seem to work well.

Special gifts from Sequim

Clairee Meeks, of Sequim, and her family pledged not to buy each other Christmas gifts over the past two years, opting instead to invest in soldier care packages.

“We’re like most families, we don’t have a lot of money but we save some up for Christmas,” Meeks said. “At our age, my husband and I don’t need any gifts anymore and I think there are other people in the same position all around Sequim that can make the same request.”

Meeks said numerous soldiers responded to the care packages she sent before the holidays last year and she put their letters into a scrapbook to pass around to her family on Christmas morning.

“It’s better than exchanging gifts because you’re exchanging soldiers’ stories while creating good will amongst your family,” Meeks said. “What could be better?”

Meeks said people can donate as much or as little as they want. Care packages only need postage for within the United States, the military delivers it the rest of the way she said.

“I use a site called anysoldier.com, which details exactly what different soldiers in different areas are requesting from the states,” Meeks said, adding that proper APO/PFO military addresses are included. “Plus, if you are too busy, they have premade packages, but that’s not as fun as putting it together yourself.”

Meeks said letters she included in the packages developed several overseas pen pals. She’s even received thankful letters from their family members in the states.

“I just wanted to make sure I was helping our men and women the best that I could from our little town,” Meeks said. “But I discovered the whole process was more rewarding than I ever imagined.”

To send care packages or donate goods to be included in care packages for U.S. soldiers in the Middle East, drop off items at the Sandell family home at 207 W. Maple St., Sequim. Items soldiers are looking for include:

- Baby wipes
- Beef jerky
- Energy bars
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Powdered energy drink
- Gum and hard candy
- Avon Skin So Soft
- AA-cell batteries
- Personal hygiene gear
- Letters of encouragement
- Prepaid phone cards

Too busy to shop for and ship a care package? Go online to anysoldier.com and pay for an already prepared package to be sent overseas to any military division in any country.

Sponsors

