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Saturday, February 10, 2007 6:11 AM CST
Area soldiers to receive Valentine greetings
By JOSH NELSON, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO --- Some are barely legible scribbles smeared with cupcake frosting and misapplied glue. Others are carefully constructed tidings of safe holiday wishes.

No matter the condition or appearance, the meaning was all the same for almost 100 Valentines destined for a trio of Waterloo soldiers deployed in Iraq. The holiday greetings were constructed by patrols at the Family YMCA of Black Hawk County. The event was organized by the SilverSneakers, a fitness group for senior citizens.

Mardel Conradson said she makes the trip from New Hampton to the YMCA twice a week to participate in the SilverSneakers program. She took the time out to whip up a greeting covered with ribbons and hearts.

Her nephew is in the Air Force and was stationed in Uzbekistan for three months. He now lives in Florida, but Conradson thinks about the other soldiers still serving overseas.

"I hope it's over soon," she said.

She said she wanted to make the Valentine to show there's support for the troops back at home.

Three-year-old David Williams' creation fell somewhere between cautious and chaotic. Light and dark shades of pink hearts were glued scattershot on the front of the folded red paper. On the inside, his mother, Laurie, wished the soldiers a safe and happy holiday for David and herself.

This was the first year he's made Valentines, and so far it's been

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a hit, Laurie Williams said. The first time was Thursday when they made the greetings at the YMCA's day care, she said. Later that night, she said he was still excited and wanted to make more.

"He's definitely into it," Williams said.

He was also into a chocolate cupcake with red frosting, which ended up all over his face. Several young children from the YMCA's Child Development Center sat down with staff, YMCA patrons or SilverSneakers members to make Valentines.

The SilverSneakers program has 2,500 participants nationwide, said Rebecca Geffers, a representative of the national SilverSneakers program. About 30 people participate in the program at the YMCA.

The idea for the Valentine's came from a Web site, www.ansoldier.com, where people can contact soldiers serving in their area who are serving on active duty. The three soldiers who will receive the Valentines will then distribute them to the roughly 90 men they oversee, Geffers said.

Sasha Courbat, YMCA wellness director, said the Valentines also fall neatly into the organization's history, which has a strong history of supporting the troops since World War I.

Contact Josh Nelson at (319) 291-1565 or josh.nelson@wfcourier.com.

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