



Adopt a Soldier Program Needs Volunteers

Pamela E. Walck, Savannahnow.com, December 26, 2009

Local Adopt-A-Soldier organizers say with the slow economy and holidays in full swing, the number of civilians looking to adopt men and women in uniform going off to war is on the decline. It's a problem compounded by the fact that the 3rd Infantry Division's 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team's last main body flights to Kuwait - in preparation for the unit's year-long deployment to Iraq - wrapped up recently. Division headquarters and the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team already are down range in Iraq, and the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade is deployed to Afghanistan. "We're just trying to get the word out to anyone interested in adopting a soldier and maybe just don't know about the program," said Carol Megathlin, Adopt-A-Soldier founder. "Right now, there are about 1,500 soldiers in need of adoption. A lot are first-timers (deploying), although I have just as many who have been with the 3rd ID and were adopted last time, and they are talking it up with their buddies." The program started in 2007, when Megathlin and several other volunteers seeking to keep deployed soldiers stay connected - and remembered during war - created a program for soldiers that allowed anyone who signed up to be "adopted" by complete strangers who wanted to thank the troops in a more tangible way. Kathryn Brantley was among the 2,000 volunteers who adopted one of 7,000 area soldiers who left as part of former President George W. Bush's troop surge. "I first learned about it through my church," said Brantley, who adopted a 23-year-old female soldier named April Williams. "She had already deployed, so I just sent her an e-mail and she wrote back, and it started a relationship from there." Brantley found herself writing every day. Care packages soon followed.

Their early discussions about the weather turned into more serious talk about family and career decisions. Brantley found herself offering advice to the young soldier, who was already on her third deployment. For Christmas, Brantley said she and her teenage daughter assembled gifts for April and her 12 tent mates, filling decorated boxes with makeup samples and body lotions so they would all have something to open on Christmas Day. When tragedy struck Brantley's family - her mother died in a car accident on Valentine's Day - it was April's words that pierced her grief and brought some encouragement. And when April returned from war, Brantley was at the Hunter Army Airfield hangar to welcome her friend home. "I'm not even sure how to describe the feeling, when I was standing there and they open those doors and all those soldiers come marching in," Brantley said. "It was an awesome experience." The Savannah resident said though she initially adopted the soldier to show support to the military, it turned into so much more. "This program really touched me in a way that was completely unexpected," she said. "... It opened my eyes to the plight of the soldier a lot more. I lived in Savannah my whole life and didn't stop to think, until I got involved." It's a connection Megathlin said has happened to many volunteers who signed up to support soldiers and found themselves making friends. "I think people still want to do it, but feel like they can't or feel like they can't send as many packages as they once did," said Megathlin, who added that for many deployed soldiers, just a couple handwritten letters are better than nothing. "Soldiers know it's a good program, so a lot are agreeing to sign up, which is wonderful, but we just need to find patriotic citizens who want to ... show their patriotism in a concrete way." [Want to Adopt a Soldier? Contact Carol Megathlin by e-mail at carol.megathlin@comcast.net.](mailto:carol.megathlin@comcast.net)