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Nov 24, 12:33 PM

Consider sending gifts to soldiers abroad

Dear Help!: Could you try to find an address in Iraq for our family to send gifts to the soldiers? Instead of exchanging among ourselves, we would like to give them our Christmas gifts.

Margie Bryan, Rockledge

A public affairs officer at Patrick Air Force Base was unaware of any local programs specifically geared toward sharing holiday cheer with area troops stationed abroad.

Lt. Kevin Coffman, spokesman for the 45th Space Wing, instead suggested using Any Soldier Inc. "It's well thought of," he said.

The all-volunteer organization is one of many groups formed to bolster the spirits of men and women serving overseas that is listed on the Department of Defense Web site at www.defendamerica.mil.

Begun as one family's show of support for their deployed son, the nonprofit Any Soldier program has grown to the point where its founder, former Army Sgt. Marty Horn of La Plata, Md., finds himself answering hundreds of e-mails a day.

The home-based Any Soldier movement took off in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks when the U.S. Postal Service stopped delivery of mail marked "To any soldier."

Ideally suited for those who don't know anyone in the military overseas, the Web site at www.anysoldier.org contains sections on what to send, who to send it to and how to send it.

On the receiving end, the group relies on uniformed personnel who volunteer to make their addresses available to the public. Packages are addressed to them for distribution to others in their units who aren't getting mail.

Horn put the number of contacts at 764 earlier this week and estimated they were positioned to help about 31,000 male and 6,500 female service members.

To avoid conflict with the no-mail-to-any-soldier policy, Any Soldier suggests addressing packages to the contact, using his or her full military address. Beneath the return address, participants are asked to write "Attn: Any Soldier/Sailor/Airman/Marine," as applicable.

That's the signal for the contact to single out a colleague who'll be receiving an

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unexpected care package from home.

To reach Lang, mail Help!, FLORIDA TODAY, 1 Gannett Plaza, Melbourne, FL 32940. Fax 255-9550. E-mail go2guy4help@cfl.rr.com. Include name, address, phone.

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