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August 30, 2005

Albany-- Debbie Travis of Albany wanted to send care packages to some soldiers serving overseas.

She asked a few of her co-workers at the Georgia Department of Human Resources in Albany to help collect supplies. But the ladies didn't expect the small project would change their lives.

"We'll pack it full of things, as much as we can get in here," she said.

Last fall, Debbie Travis visited the anysoldier.com website to find out how she could send care packages to troops overseas. "It really touched my heart when I read about the things they were asking for."

The military men and women didn't want the luxuries of home, but some basic things most of us take for granted. "Toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, razor

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blades. Popcorn, sunglasses, slippers because the showers are so grungy, baby wipes," she said.

So Debbie and a few of her co-workers started collecting supplies. "We started out kind of small." At first they mailed out just a few boxes. "In response to a specific request."

But then, "We started stockpiling, as you can see. We would see things on sale and buy them and bring them in."

Word about what the three ladies were doing quickly spread around the DHR office, and other people started to donate money and supplies. "For us, postage is the biggest hold up. We wait until pay day and people donate more and we can send more boxes."

What started with Travis wanting to help the troops, quickly turned into an entire office building sending hundreds of care packages overseas. "This year we've sent almost 300."

Then another surprise, the ladies started getting letters and packages back from the troops. "We've gotten a lot of letters saying thank you," said Debbie.

Letters from across America - each with stories, like Eddie's, that moved the workers more than they expected. "He got the box on his 21st birthday. The only other piece of mail he had gotten there, he'd been there about six months, was the divorce papers from his wife."

The group made a scrapbook of the letters and flags they receive. "They write us and tell us thank you, you're our hero, but we're saying no, you're our hero. You're the ones putting your lives on the line."

One care package is for an Albany police officer now serving in Iraq. He's the latest in a long, and growing, list of military men and women who need some support.

In a few days, he'll get that support from a group of co-workers from his hometown that he's never even met.

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