

Students donate birthday presents to Kansans in Iraq

By Dave Ranney

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Somewhere in Iraq, a soldier and a nurse from Kansas are about to get a few dozen birthday presents.

As far as anyone knows, it's not their birthday.

But that's not the point.

"We're just supporting our troops," said Susan Cary, whose 8-year-old son, Joseph, agreed to use his Jan. 29 birthday party to collect presents for Joseph A. Jackson, a soldier who happened to share his first name.

Cary's friend, Patricia Peterson, got her daughter, Megan, 8, to do the same for a nurse who shared her last name.

The two families hosted a big birthday party Saturday at the Lawrence Indoor Aquatic Center. They invited Megan and Joseph's second-grade classmates at Langston Hughes School.

Instead of bringing presents for Joseph and Megan, the students were asked to pick from a list of items needed in Iraq.

"When we explained the idea to our kids they really got excited about it," Peterson said.

So, too, did their friends.

"We've probably got about 100 pounds of stuff to send over there," Cary said.

She began filling out the customs forms Wednesday.

Cary found Jackson and nurse Katherine Peterson on www.anysoldier.com, a Web site aimed at helping the public show support for U.S. forces in Iraq.

According to the Web site, Peterson is assigned to a trauma center in Kirkuk. Jackson is in Baghdad.

“(Jackson) is a good trooper. He’s someone you can count on,” said Staff Sgt. Tim McCaine, a spokesman for Jackson’s Ottawa-based National Guard unit. “He’s a hard charger in everything he does.”

Attempts to find out more about nurse Peterson were unsuccessful.

In a Dec. 7 letter on the Web site, nurse Peterson wrote: “We treat all serious illness and injury. Due to the high volume of patients, we are running out of clothes for them to wear while they are in ICU.

“Most of the time when soldiers come in their clothes are torn, dirty, or simply missing. The only thing we have for them to wear right now are hospital gowns, and even those are becoming hard to find.

“It would be great for them to have something to wear other than a gown.”

She asked for large-size, logo-free sweatshirts, sweatpants, T-shirts and, for those with leg injuries, shorts.

“We got a bunch — probably 20 T-shirts, four or five hooded sweatshirts and 10 pairs of sweatpants and shirts,” Cary said.

Other requested items included toiletries, DVDs, video games, batteries, paperback books, crossword puzzles, card games, microwave popcorn and microphones for computers.

Plans call for shipping a few boxes every three or four days.

“You’re asked to do that so they don’t arrive all at once,” Cary said.

Cary’s husband, Dan, a financial adviser, spent eight years in the U.S. Army. Peterson’s husband, Kent, a dentist, put in 21 years.

“What we tried to do is give our kids a sense that they are part of a bigger world and that the world doesn’t just revolve around what’s going on in Lawrence, Kan.,” Cary said. “And that while things are really nice here, there are people in Iraq who are defending our freedoms.”

Megan added, “We’re sending them this stuff, so we can live in a free country.”