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Any Soldier Laurentian Chamber provides comfort for soldiers in Iraq

Angie Riebe
Mesabi Daily News
Wednesday, October 11th, 2006 09:35:31 PM

VIRGINIA — Dozens of wounded American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan will feel the comfort, care and support of the Iron Range as they heal in field hospitals.

The sweatpants and sweatshirts they put on will contain a label identifying them as a donation sent from the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce in Virginia.

Last Friday, the chamber sent a check for \$994.72 to the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project — a non-profit organization that provides comfort and relief items for military members who become sick, injured or wounded from service overseas.

Donated items are distributed to military patients at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, the largest American military hospital outside the United States and to field hospitals in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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The contribution from the chamber is the remaining funds from last year's Any Soldier benefit, which included fund-raising events in Virginia and Forbes.

People throughout the Iron Range donated money, food, supplies and letters. As a result, more than 1,800 pounds of supplies were sent in 454 packages via AnySoldier.com, facilitated by a network of volunteer soldiers who distribute letters and boxes to those soldiers in their units who never or rarely get mail from home.

In all, more than \$18,000 was raised for shipping expenses and to buy additional care package items. The chamber also used a portion of the money to sponsor the homecoming black-tie dinners for area soldiers at an event in Cloquet.

The chamber — which received numerous letters, cards and e-mails from overseas soldiers thankful for the care packages that arrived around Christmas — sought a



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place to send the remaining money, said Pam Pilney, chamber administrative assistant.

The local Any Soldier committee wanted the money to be used in the most efficient way that would let soldiers know "they are still supported," she said.

The Landstuhl project was a good fit.

Many of the military personnel transported to field hospitals — often for extended stays — arrive with no extra clothing. The program's goal is to assist with garments and items needed during their hospitalization as well as to enhance morale.

The nearly \$1,000 will buy 86 sweatsuits to be sent to two hospitals in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, Pilney said. "It will have a tag on it saying where it came from. It's a nice way to make a difference."

According to the LHCP Web site, "hospital staff report that when patients learn that they and their fallen service members are remembered 'back home,' spirits are lifted."

The site lists other items needed at field hospitals, including quilts and blankets, drawstring medical bags, knit cast socks, winter coats, and coupons for use at the grocery store and commissary.

LHCP donations are also sent in honor of a military member who lost his or her life in service to our country.

The chamber's donation will be given in memory of Pfc. Sam Williams Huff, 18, of Tucson, Ariz., who died April 18, 2005, in Baghdad, Iraq, of injuries sustained April 17, 2005, when an improvised explosive device detonated near her. She was assigned to the 170th Military Police Co., 504th Military Police Battalion, 42nd Military Police Brigade, Fort Louis, Wash.

"It's a way to honor her," Pilney said.

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To learn more about the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project, go to www.landstuhlhospitalcareproject.org.

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