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'Good luck' sent to soldiers in Iraq

Special Olympian thanked as 'hero' for sharing medals

By LINDA BRADEN ALBERT
The (Maryville) Daily Times

MARYVILLE, Tenn. — A generous donation of "good luck" sent to soldiers in Iraq was returned to a Blount County man after the recipients' safe return home.

Ryan Rahe, an active participant in Special Olympics since middle school, has won numerous medals in several sports, especially bowling and swimming. The 25-year-old man has shared his medals with soldiers several times, with his most recent gifts going to soldiers in the Virginia Army National Guard in Iraq.

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"He sent the medals and said they were for good luck, and thank you for fighting for our country," said Ryan's mother,

Jayne Rahe.

"I put a little note in there and said since Ryan is not going to be able to protect our country, I really appreciated the work they were doing for that."

Jayne said earlier recipients had acknowledged Ryan's gifts, but this time, the young man received a special surprise. The soldiers sent him a package containing an American flag that had accompanied the crew of UH-60L Black Hawk helicopter 26849 on a combat sortie in Iraq, a certificate of appreciation of Ryan's continued friendship and support, and a photograph of the men holding the flag and Ryan's medals — which had accompanied them on this mission — in front of their helicopter.

'Courage' remembered

The letter written by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Anthony W. Grillett on Jan. 10 thanked Ryan for sending the medals.

"I and the Battalion can never thank you enough for sending us your medals," Grillett wrote. "They have brought us luck and good fortune, and now as we prepare to deploy home we send them back to you with our eternal gratitude.

"That you would send us something so precious is a reflection of your character. As you called us heroes; to me you are the hero. For I believe it is not who you are, or what you are that makes you a hero, it is the ability to give all especially when it is never asked.

"Your courage to face the challenges required earning those medals and then so freely send them to us here in Iraq will forever make you a hero to me. I will never be able to truly express in words how honored I was when I read the letter from your Mother. It truly humbles me and shows me that what I fight for in our country will always be worth the small sacrifices asked of me. Thank you again."



Ryan Rahe, with mom Jayne, holds the flag that soldiers sent him after he sent his medals to them for good luck. (DARYL SULLIVAN / THE DAILY TIMES)

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The letter was signed, "Your friend always."

Jayne Rahe said the idea of sending support to the soldiers in harm's way came about when she and Ryan were talking about news coverage of the war in Iraq. Jayne visited a www.anysoldier.com online and discovered how she and Ryan could let the men and women in Iraq know their efforts are appreciated.

Ryan, named 2006 Special Olympics Athlete of the Year for the Blount County Sports Hall of Fame, said he felt good when he received the box from the soldiers. He said if he could talk with them face to face, he would say, "Thank you."

The Rahes plan to continue sending care packages to soldiers, including the medals.

"Ryan is a pretty generous fellow," Jayne said. "He doesn't mind giving things to people."

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