

Family reaches out to troops overseas

Couple raise money for care packages

By AMANDA LEE MYERS
FOR THE TRIBUNE

Buying holiday gifts for family members is expected; buying them for U.S. troops stationed in the Middle East is inspired.

For the second consecutive year, Scottsdale residents Doug and Kristie Taylor raised more than \$1,000 to send care packages to 15 Army National Guard troops they have never met.

As part of the Taylors' homemade project "Operation: Care Pack Iraq," last week the troops stationed in Iraq and Kuwait

Help out

• For information on how to help troops, visit www.defendamerica.mil

• For information about the Taylors and "Operation: Care Pack Iraq" go to www.jetcareers.com

received 11 cardboard boxes filled with gifts and supplies, including napkins, deodorant, popcorn, Snickers bars and a DVD/VCR player.

"This is the season of giving. We're just trying to say, 'Hi, we're glad you guys are out there protecting our freedom,'" said Doug, a 34-year-old pilot for Delta Airlines.

SEE OVERSEAS • PAGE A2

OVERSEAS: 'Even just a little help is a great feat'

FROM PAGE A1

Unit commander Chief Warrant Officer James McMahon said that when the boxes arrived Dec. 16, they were emptied within five minutes.

"During this time of year, we all get well-wishes from our friends and family back home. We expect that," McMahon wrote in an e-mail from Kuwait. "But when strangers go above and beyond . . . wow, that is something else."

Another soldier, Rich Wienches of Pennsylvania, wrote that the gifts could not have arrived at a better time.

"When you're away from home at the holidays, we all get depressed," he wrote. "It's acts of kindness . . . that make our deployment and mission a little better, just knowing there are good people back in the states that support us."

The Taylors began last year when Doug's college roommate, Mike Daftarian, was deployed to Iraq before the holidays.

"We were all kind of bumming" Doug said. "So we brought everyone together to raise some money, and it was a snowball effect; it just got bigger and bigger."

So big, in fact, that the Taylors raised \$3,000 to spend on troops last Christmas.



PAUL O'NEILL, TRIBUNE

SENDING CARE: Doug and Kristie Taylor have just sent 11 care packages to the troops in Kuwait and Iraq.

Daftarian, an Air Force captain, said he will never forget the day his unit received 17 boxes brimming with gifts and supplies.

"I just thought he was sending cookies and candy," said Daftarian, 33. "Then we get these boxes that weighed 700 pounds."

Daftarian's unit was stationed in Iraq for seven months. Now that the Queen Creek resident is back home, he said he is glad to lend the Taylors a hand to help the troops stationed in the Middle East.

"I like to take care of the people over there," Daftarian said. "Just because my time there is finished doesn't mean

I don't pay attention to what the guys are doing and try to make things good for them."

Daftarian said he donated \$60 to this year's cause.

Doug said that even \$5 donations are appreciated and that often is the most young, struggling pilots can spare.

"Even just a little help is a great feat," he said.

He said sending the packages holds a special meaning for him, even though he has never met any of the troops stationed in Iraq and Kuwait.

"It's even better when you give something if you don't know the person because you're not doing it for something in return or out of guilt," he said. "It's not like giving crazy cousin Eddie something because he's your cousin and you have to. These are people you don't know and who you want to share your appreciation with."

Doug said that what he and his wife do for the troops is nothing compared with what the servicemen and -women sacrifice.

"If you look at the big picture, collecting money and sending packages, I could do it in my sleep," he said. "But I can't even imagine leaving my family and living in some desert somewhere. This is the easy stuff."

CONTACT WRITER: (480) 970-2330