



UTAH NATIONAL GUARD PUBLIC AFFAIRS
12953 S. Minuteman Drive, Draper, UT 84020-1776
P: (801) 432-4407 - F: (801) 432-4677 - www.ut.ngb.army.mil

Press Release 09-001, 8 January 2009

Contact: LTC Hank McIntire, (801) 420-4778

For Immediate Release

Utah National Guard's Family Program Office Brings Christmas to Military Members and Families

DRAPER, Utah – It goes without saying that the holiday season is a busy time for everyone, but it was particularly so for the Utah National Guard's Family Program office.

The year 2008 saw a dramatic increase in both the needs of military families and the response of the community to provide resources to bridge that gap.

According to Maj. Annette Barnes, director of the Utah Guard's Family Program, generous donations from private citizens and organizations, the Utah National Guard Charitable Trust, and the efforts of the 20 full-time employees of the Family Program office, were enough to provide a more meaningful Christmas for Soldier, Airman, Marine and Sailor families in Utah.

Each working day during late November and through December, Barnes' team was seen scurrying like Santa's elves through their work area wrapping presents, stuffing stockings and labeling boxes and large garbage bags filled with gifts and food for those in need. Her staff worked through Christmas Eve, getting the last of the packages and gifts out to families and anxious children.

Adding to Barnes' Army during the month were another 30 to 40 Utah Guard employees who would stop by during their breaks and at lunch to help tame the wrapping paper-and-ribbon jungle that seemed to take over offices and cubicles in Draper headquarters.

Outside organizations took up the cause too. SaharaCares, a West Bountiful charitable foundation for at-risk children, donated gifts to support the effort. One SaharaCares worker is a Guard spouse, who was instrumental in getting her employer to adopt 15 military families in 2007, and that number jumped to 20 families this year, said Barnes.

Other groups adopted families for Christmas to include Career Step, a medical transcription and coding company in Springville, and the Cedar City Fire Department, which provided the whole holiday package – Christmas tree, dinner, gifts and clothes – to military spouses and children in Southern Utah.

-more-

All told, the Utah Guard Family Programs office helped more than 110 families, totaling about 300 children, according to Barnes, besting their 2007 numbers of 90 households and 260 kids helped during the holidays.

“It grows every year just by word of mouth,” said Barnes. “That Christmas love just spreads.”

It seemed that everyone found a way to help this year. One generous Utah woman, who wished to remain anonymous, recruited her family and friends to prepare 40 complete turkey dinners with all the trimmings and dropped them off at the Utah Guard headquarters two days before Thanksgiving.

Lucille Argyle, and Shirley Shepherd, of Benjamin, got together a few weeks ago with other ladies and girls from their local church to write letters to deployed Guard members. The two delivered their messages contained in a large Christmas stocking to the Family Program office in early December.

“I was so pleased with how this turned out,” said Argyle. “It was a great way to begin [the holidays].”

At South Hills Middle School in Riverton, students raised \$2,000, specifically for the Utah Guard’s Sub for Santa program, and presented it to Barnes at a school assembly Dec. 19.

Another year-round project that gets the most attention during the holidays is the Utah Guard Food Pantry, which is a part of each of the 12 Family Assistance Centers throughout the state. Cabinets filled with nonperishable food items help get families through till payday.

“It’s tremendous that they see the need out there and have a desire to pitch in,” said Barnes of the many food drives organized by Utah Guard units to help keep each pantry stocked.

While some funds from the Utah Guard Charitable Trust were used to support these holiday projects, about 70 percent of the families benefitted were helped through private sources.

“We were expecting to have less support this year because of the economy, but in fact, donations went up,” added Barnes. “It didn’t affect the charitable hearts of our Guard friends and neighbors. Even though we’re going through hard times, people were still willing to reach into their pocket to help their neighbor.”