

Refs Make “Call” To Support Troops

Local basketball referees send sports gear to Pennsylvania troops serving overseas.

(Excerpted from an article by Richard Blandy, Sentinel Correspondent)



Preparing boxes for shipping overseas

Pennsylvania military units in Iraq and Afghanistan can expect a shipment from Carlisle soon.

They will get sports and recreation gear from the Central Pennsylvania Basketball Officials Association.

About 40 people, including a dozen referees, their families and their friends, gathered over the weekend at the home of retired Col. Mike Pearson for a “packing party” for the gear. They prepared \$3,000 worth of sports equipment as part of a program called “Make the Call—Support Our Troops.”

“Several months ago I said we should do something to show our respect for the troops who are serving and somebody came up with the idea to contribute money from game fees to buy the sports gear,” Pearson says.

The decision was aided by thoughts from an Army captain on the way home from Iraq. Pearson sat beside the officer on a recent flight, and when he asked what the soldiers could use, the captain said the soldiers weren’t looking for food or movies but really needed recreation gear.



Board 70 PA officials with family members and friends

More than \$4,000 was collected through the end of April, Pearson says.

“We went to Dick’s in Mechanicsburg, who gave a terrific discount, and we bought \$3,000 worth of recreation gear,” collected packing material, then picked Memorial Day weekend to pack up the items to be shipped overseas.

“It just seemed like the right time to put everything together and ship it out,” Pearson says.

The soldiers will get basketballs, footballs, volleyballs and bocce equipment. Also tucked into the packages as filler are items such as baby wipes and socks.

And that’s not all.

“We have about \$1,300 left so we’ll make another purchase with some different stuff in the near future,” Pearson says.

But Sunday’s packing party was the main event.

Personal Connections

Helping out the troops hits home for Pearson, whose daughter, 2nd Lt. Carolyn Pearson, has been in Iraq since February with the 67th Combat Support Hospital.

“It means a lot to me from that perspective,” says Pearson.

He helped raise money and volunteered the garage of his Noble Boulevard home for a storage area and staging area for packing up the gear.

But “the real story here is supporting the troops who are serving overseas.”

He says the referees wanted to undertake the project “because most of us have probably refereed a game at one time or another with a kid playing who is now a soldier, Marine, or sailor over there in the



Sports equipment

desert.”

They “wanted to do something to show our respect for the decisions those youngsters made to go out and serve.”

The referees have been involved in a lot of community service projects, says referee Mike Bennett, whose son, Pvt. David Bennett, is a Marine at Camp Lejeune, NC.

“Some of us have volunteered in the past to raise money for the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and Hoops for Hunger,” Mike Bennett says.

“But the main reason I’m out today is to support our chapter and our son serving with the Marines. It is a way for us to connect and support the other people who are serving our nation.”

To Homestate Troops

The sports and recreation gear is headed for units where troops from Pennsylvania are assigned, as identified by a list of units maintained by a New York-based organization called SOAR (Support Our American Troops).

Pearson says the group organizes efforts like the local one throughout the country, and helps volunteer groups inspect the boxes for shipping. It then ships the care packages through customs with unit labels affixed to the boxes.

He expects local SOAR members to inspect the referees’ packages on Thursday.

“If this stuff we’re sending helps relieve their stress when they’re off duty, then we will have been successful,” Pearson says.