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## Curves organizes Troop Valentines

*VFW helps with shipping costs*

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Lititz Record Express

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**WARWICK TWP.** - Valentine's Day was filled with love for U.S. troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, thanks to the efforts of the staff and members of Curves, 30 Minute Fitness and Weight Loss Center in Lititz, who have organized "Troop Valentines."



After attending a Curves convention in Las Vegas, owner Denise Moser and her staff gathered to discuss the possibility of pulling together a "different" sort of community service effort. Trainer Celeste Van Belle, whose daughter is with the National Guard in Harrisburg, suggested sending much needed personal items to the soldiers stationed in war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Curves benefits women in so many different ways, physically, mentally, spiritually, and we also stress community service," said Van Belle. "We all agreed that everyone else does drives at Christmas so we thought it would be nice to do something for the troops on Valentine's Day."

The group partnered with [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com), a non-profit, charitable organization that lists 1,032 contacts that help approximately 43, 150 soldiers from all branches of the military service.

"Soldiers register with them, giving vital information," explained Van Belle.

"For instance, say Capt. Mary Smith signs up, she will list how many males and how many females and types of items needed. And when we send it all out, we address it to Capt. Mary Smith, a specific name. Underneath her name we add, "Attention Any Soldier" so she knows the package was through the organization. She will then get the box and distribute the contents among her fellow soldiers."

In 2003 the government issued an announcement stating that no unsolicited packages could be sent to the troops, thereby ending the "Dear Abby" and "Any Service Member" mail programs. Any Soldier, Inc. picked up the ball and created [AnySoldier.com](http://AnySoldier.com), a listing of volunteer service members stating the needs and wants of their units. Mail is addressed to a specific soldier and the items are therefore requested, not unsolicited.

To get those items to send to the soldiers, however, was the biggest challenge of "Troop Valentines." Beginning on Monday, Dec. 6, the staff began by creating a complete list of items that the soldiers were asking for, and then posted it for their members to reference. As each 30-minute exercise cycle ended, an announcement was made to the members about the "Troop Valentine" support program and that their participation would be most welcome.

"Donations poured in, far more than we ever could have hoped for," said Van Belle. "It was just incredible."

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The surprises weren't over, however, much to their delight. John Zagorski, representing Lititz Springs VFW Post 1463, stepped in to offer funds to pay for the shipping costs of the boxes, a donation of 25 international calling cards and a letter for each soldier, inviting them to join the VFW upon their return home.

"The VFW was so very generous," said Van Belle. "Mr. Zagorski also gave us the names of 14 local men and women serving over there so those were the first boxes that were prepared and sent."

Doug Williams, owner of the UPS Store at 1002 Lititz Pike, also wishing to help, donated \$50 worth of shipping boxes and included 40 letters to put into the boxes as a thank you to the troops.

"One of our members, Cindy Templeton, a Mary Kay distributor, donated lip balm with an excellent sunscreen as well as body wash," said Moser, "and she gave us one letter for each of the 14 local soldiers' boxes. The outpouring of caring and compassion has been overwhelming. It's an honor to operate a business in a community that is so giving."

Gathering on Saturday, Jan. 8, staff and members of the popular fitness center met for a "packing party," during which 40 boxes were lovingly filled to the brim with items that would bring a little bit of home to the soldiers.

"Doing this project this just seems so insignificant compared to what our military men and women are doing over there for our country," admitted Van Belle. "And I hope that when they come back they are welcomed as the heroes that they are."

With almost 7,000 locations, Curves is the world's largest fitness franchise and the fastest growing franchise in history. Currently, Curves helps over two million women realize their fitness and weight loss goals every day. Curves is located in the lower level of the Lititz Warwick Center at 26 Copperfield Circle in Lititz. They can be reached at 627-2234.

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