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AnySoldier reconnects the military with those in the rest of the world

PUBLISHED: November 17, 2006

The Web site came with a warning, but I didn't listen."Contents of this site are addictive. Persons using this site may be overcome with tears of sympathy or tears of joy. May also cause a sense of pride in our great nation and the fighting men and women who defend our freedom."

A few hours after logging onto www.AnySoldier.com for the first time last weekend, I reread the warning and realized just how true the first sentence was.

As I clicked on story after story and read some of the firsthand accounts of those currently stationed around the globe in harm's way, I glanced at the clock.

A few hours had passed, but that was OK. It was some of the most fascinating reading I've done in awhile.

That's not surprising to Marty Horn, a 20-year Army veteran who started the Web site after his son, Brian, headed off to Iraq with the Army three years ago.



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Horn gets so many e-mails from people after their first visit to his site that he's created a list of the most memorable letters. He calls those people his site's newest junkies.

"We even have junkie certificates," he said Wednesday from his Indiana home. "This time of the year with the holidays and everyone wanting to do something, the e-mails we receive are uncountable."

[AnySoldier.com](#) started as a simple family effort. The Horns wanted to help their son, who was one of the 1,000 infantry soldiers with the 173rd Airborne Brigade who parachuted into northern Iraq back in March 2003.

"We knew his unit was living under very rough conditions, so whenever we sent care packages to Brian, we always sent enough to share with fellow soldiers," Horn said.

The idea behind the site is simple: Military personnel log on and create profiles for themselves and their various units.

The soldiers detail how many men and women are in the unit, as well as where they are stationed and what goods they could use out in the field.

Some request toiletries, while others put out pleas for beef jerky or a soccer ball to kick around during their off-time to keep their minds off the tragedies of war they're facing every waking hour.

Depending on their assignments, some soldiers come on the site and give regular updates on their tours of duty.

The soldiers who are listed have volunteered to serve as contact people for the site.

When donors send care packages through the site, the donor is instructed to address it to the individual soldier on the site, but also to add the words "Attn: Any Soldier" underneath.

That way, when the package arrives, the soldier knows it came from someone reading the Web site. Those goods are then shared with fellow servicemen and -women.

Those soldiers who don't receive a lot of mail from their own friends and family are the first to receive one of the packages.

"It's truly a great program," Horn said. "It's soldiers looking out for one another. The idea has just exploded."

Sgt. Brian Horn was the first one to sign up with his father's site to help distribute the mailed goods. Having been honorably discharged after completing tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 26-year-old remains involved in the project that he calls "awe-inspiring."

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"The 'Any Soldier' campaign has seen tears from some, given hope to most and has been inspirational to us all," he said. "To have been able to distribute the mail personally as a contact to soldiers who get next to no mail at all and for that brief moment see the look of hope in their faces of good things to come. The hope that somebody out there does care. That somebody does, in fact, love them as they deservingly should be loved."

When the site first launched in August 2003, it contained contact information for seven soldiers. Three days short of its one-year anniversary, the site hit its 1,000th soldier. As of earlier this week, it boasted nearly 4,000 profiles of those currently serving overseas.

Since the site launched, nearly 22,000 soldiers have been listed as contacts. Because of all the care packages sent to them, Horn estimates that nearly 640,000 soldiers have received some sort of support through his Web site.

According to military personnel, the site has become one of the leading efforts in making sure that soldiers are being cared for via packages from home.

Horn estimates he spends about 70 hours a week updating the site. It's grown so quickly that a small staff had to be hired to assist him.

Since the site launched, it's received more than 93 million hits. Nearly 27.5 million of those visits have been this year alone.

Some of those hits have come from my computer over the last few days, as well as from the home computer of Destiny Eadie, an 11-year-old girl from Van Buren Township.

The sixth-grader has set out on a mission this year of collecting 2,000 Christmas cards to send to U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq. She thought up the idea last year after logging onto the site.

Several businesses donated cards to her and now she's seeking people to sign them.

Township officials praised Destiny for her idea and have donated the use of the craft room inside Township Hall, 46425 Tyler Road, for her effort.

From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. tomorrow, people can stop in and sign a card or bring their own.

Destiny's parents, along with volunteers who donated some cash, are taking care of mailing the cards to the soldiers. All she's asking for are some signatures and a couple thousand nice handwritten messages.

And that, according to Marty Horn, is arguably the best gift one can send.

"The most important thing in a package is the letter," he said. "This is

about support, not stuff. A letter from you, your children, the kids at church or school is the best thing to send. A show of personal support is far better than spending a bunch of money that you don't have."

So, during the coming weeks, when you're sitting with your friends and family enjoying a holiday meal, remember those who are stationed thousands of miles away who haven't seen their loved ones in months, if not years.

Take a minute to sit down, jot down a message and send it off. [AnySoldier.com](#) makes it way too easy to say you don't have the time.

And, if you're financially able, grab an extra package of Chex Mix or a canister of peanuts when you're shopping for your own groceries and include that, too.

The feeling you'll get afterward will leave you understanding just how nice it is to give to someone who's truly worthy and asks for so little.

Contact Staff Writer Jason Alley at jalley@heritage.com or at 1-734-246-0867.



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