



OPERATION GRATITUDE

Sending Care Packages to U.S. Troops

OPERATION GRATITUDE SENDS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CARE PACKAGES ANNUALLY!!!

Operation Gratitude, www.operationgratitude.com, is the nonprofit, all-volunteer organization that sends care packages and letters of support to troops deployed overseas. Its mission is to lift morale, put a smile on a service member's face and express the appreciation of the American people for the sacrifices of the men and women defending our freedom. To date, Operation Gratitude has sent over **290,000 care packages to individual Soldiers, Marines, Airmen and Sailors** in hostile regions such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and onto Military ships all over the world.

After 9-11, founder Carolyn Blashek felt a passionate desire to help fight the war on terrorism. Although then a 46-year-old mother of two living in Encino, Calif., her first thought was to join the Military. She quickly found out she was too old for duty and started volunteering at the military lounge in the Los Angeles airport. One day in March 2003, a soldier came into the office and broke down at her desk. He was on leave from a war zone for his mother's funeral, his wife had left him and his only child died as an infant--he had no one else in his life. "I'm going back over there; I don't think I'll make it back this time, but it really doesn't matter because no one would even care" he told her. Right then Blashek realized that when bullets are flying, it's **critical for troops to know that someone cares** about them as an individual. That's when Operation Gratitude was born.

While most organizations ask people to support the troops by writing a check, Blashek wanted to provide a more **personal and hands-on connection with our troops overseas**. She started asking everyone she met if they knew a deployed service member needing extra TLC so she could send them care packages of snacks and entertainment items. Most importantly, each package would include letters of encouragement from appreciative citizens. Now, Blashek is **contacted by leaders and commanders in the field** who see the positive impact the Operation Gratitude care packages have on their troops in combat.

This grassroots organization started at Blashek's dining room table, but now encompasses churches, schools, businesses and service groups all over the country donating items and writing letters to troops through Operation Gratitude. Since November 2003, Operation Gratitude has conducted its **packing Drives in the California Army National Guard Armory in Van Nuys, California**. All staffing remains on a volunteer basis and Blashek is committed to keeping it that way.

Operation Gratitude is a 501(c)(3) organization. All financial donations are tax-deductible and are used entirely to pay the costs of communications and shipping. **Postage cost alone is \$8.95; the overall cost per package is \$10**. All items included in the packages are donated and are **valued at \$125 per package**. More than 200 major corporations have **donated products** for the packages as **Corporate Sponsors** (donations of at least 10,000 items) or as **Friends of Operation Gratitude** (donations of 1000 items or more). Product Sponsors and Friends include: Cadbury-Adams, Dr. Pepper, OceanSpray Cranberries, Newman's Own, Sunkist Pistachios, S.F. Bay Gourmet Coffee, Newhall Coffee, 3M, SanDisk, CVS, Frito-Lay, Champion Nutrition, Guess, Quiksilver, M&M/Mars, Nestle, Hershey, HOOAH!, Beer Nuts, Coppertone and Dr. Scholl's (Schering Plough), Lubriderm, Listermint and Purell (Pfizer), Spencers, Subway, Rhino Records, Universal Home Video, Showtime Networks, Sony USA, Warner Brothers, hundreds of independent musicians, and dozens of independent food companies. Financial Corporate Sponsors include Target, CVS, Schering-Plough and Checkers/Rallys Restaurants.

Operation Gratitude is honored to partner with Chrysler LLC's Jeep brand and the Philadelphia Sports Congress to collect items during the annual **Army-Navy Football games** at Lincoln Financial Field. Similarly, Operation Gratitude has teamed with **Checkers/Rallys Restaurants** and the Indianapolis and Richmond Motor Speedways to collect items at the **Indy 500 and NASCAR races** during the annual Patriotic Drive. Both Jeep and Checkers/Rallys have donated vehicles for milestone packages.

President and Mrs. Bush invited Operation Gratitude founder, Carolyn Blashek, to the White House on March 10, 2006 and on December 18, 2006 to thank her and the organization for their invaluable support of the U.S. Military. **Lt. General Hal Moore** (Ret.), the legendary Commander made famous by the book and movie "We Were Soldiers" has embraced Operation Gratitude's mission by participating at the Armory and donating his personal writing: "A General's Spiritual Journey" for the packages.

Operation Gratitude has been **featured widely in the media**. Ms. Blashek has been a guest nationally on Fox News (Brian Wilson Weekend Live; Fox and Friends, Neil Cavuto), CNN (The Morning Show and In the Money), NPR's Morning Edition, as well as the Dennis Prager, Larry Elder, Brian Whitman, John Riggins and the Satellite Sisters Radio Shows. Operation Gratitude has been profiled on dozens of national and local TV news and radio broadcasts. Articles about Operation Gratitude have appeared in the: Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Daily News, Newsday, Washington Times, the AP, Christian Science Monitor, PR Week, the Army Times, and the Defense Department and Centcom News Online. Feature articles appeared in the September, 2004 issue of Family Circle Magazine, the July, 2005 issue of Good Housekeeping and the July 2007 issue of Valley Magazine. Dozens of Internet websites and blogs have mentioned and link to Operation Gratitude.

The organization, now with 3000+ local volunteers and tens of thousands of supporters across the country, holds both a **Patriotic Drive** (which starts during the Memorial Weekend in May) and a **Holiday Drive** (that kicks off over the Veteran' Weekend in November) each year, and anticipates sending **at least 50,000 packages during each event; 100,000 packages per year.**

Operation Gratitude welcomes volunteers as well as donations of funds and products for the packages.

Wish List Items include (but are not limited to):

DVDs and CDs
Computer Flash Drives
International Phone cards
Batteries-all sizes
Personal Cooling Products: Bandana Cool-Ties, Battery Operated Mini-fans
Boxes of Girl Scout or other Cookies (non-chocolate preferred)
Individual Packets of Trail Mix, Dried Fruit or Nuts, Snack Foods, Beef Jerky, Energy/Power bars, Candy, Gum
Ready to Eat Food Kits (Tuna, Chicken Salad); other Non-Perishable Food Products
Packets of Powdered Hot or Cold Beverages
Disposable Cameras; Handheld Electronic Games; Travel-size games
Novelties, Promotional items
Mini Stuffed Animals, Small Toys
Baseball Caps, Knit Hats and Gloves, Neck Warmers, Decorated T-shirts
Personal Care: Sunscreen, Foot Products, Lip Balm, Body Lotion, Toothpaste, Razors
Unsealed Personal Letters and Cards
Used Cell Phones, Video Games. Ink Jet Cartridges (for recycling)

In just over a year, Operation Gratitude grew from Blashek sending 10 or 15 packages a week from her home to an organization sending tens of thousands of care packages during the year. Blashek's goal is that Operation Gratitude will continue for as long as the United States Military has a service person deployed anywhere in the world. She envisions Operation Gratitude as a **permanent means for civilians to show their support and respect** for the military in a direct, personal and hands-on manner. Each year, Operation Gratitude will hold both the Patriotic and Holiday Drives, and send packages in between when notified by commanders of urgent situations.

The benefits of the Operation Gratitude program can be found in the **Mail Call** section of the Operation Gratitude website, www.operationgratitude.com which displays thousands of letters from troops that have received the care packages. One theme that runs through the letters is how surprised and appreciative the troops are that total strangers have taken the time to show they care. Perhaps the impact is best described by **Major General Mark Hertling**, Commander, 1st Armored Division, Baghdad Iraq:

"What kind of difference has it made? Our Commanders made it a point to visit every single battalion and brigade during the three days surrounding Christmas. In every location, I saw numerous Operation Gratitude packages. Every soldier received a personalized note, some holiday cheer, and some treats. And you know what? It wasn't the gifts or the cards or the notes that made such an impression...it was the realization that someone cared about our soldiers as individuals, understood the importance of their mission and appreciated their sacrifice."

And **Lt. General Ray Odierno**, Commanding, wrote in response to receiving his own care package from Operation Gratitude:

"I would like to thank you not only for the package I received from OPERATION GRATITUDE, but also for all you do for each one of the dedicated men and women who serve our great Nation. I am truly humbled by the support you, your volunteers, and your generous sponsors have shown those who sacrifice so much for our country. Though our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines may protect our freedom, its people like all of you that give them the extra motivation to do the incredible job they do every day. Thank you once again, and God bless you all."

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