

For Our TROOPS

*Support from back home
can make all the difference
in the world to our troops
serving overseas*



U.S. Army Specialist Justin Ellis talks about his tour of duty in Iraq during the 2004 Flag Day Ceremony at Stony Hill School, Fredonia, Wisconsin, birthplace of Flag Day.

A YOUNG MAN DRESSED IN his khaki military uniform stood in front of Stony Hill School during a Flag Day ceremony this past June and gave a message to the people gathered there that one could not soon forget. The old one-room schoolhouse, recognized nationally as the birthplace of Flag Day, was the perfect setting to talk about honoring life, liberty, freedom, and our nation's flag.

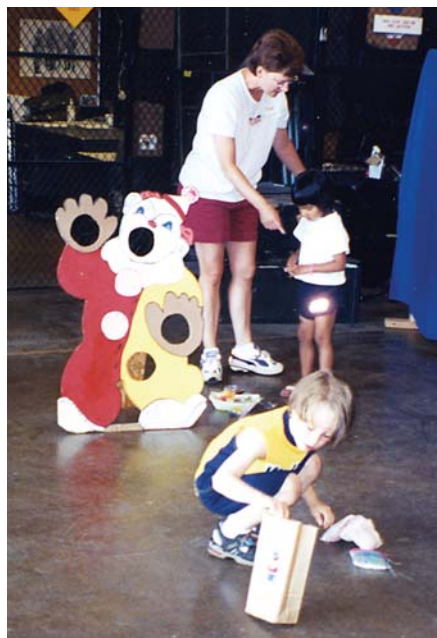
"Being in a foreign country gave me new meaning for the United States flag," stated young Justin Ellis, an Army Specialist who had just returned home from a tour of duty in Iraq. He went on to say, "People here don't realize how fortunate they are to live in America."

While in Iraq, he thought often of his two-year-old daughter and wife at home. His experiences reminded him of how precious life was and what he had to look forward to when he returned.

Ellis told the group that the support he received from people back home was overwhelming. "If it weren't for the sup-

port of people in the states, I don't know how I would have made it through," shared Ellis. "I received 30,000 letters, e-mails, and packages while I was over in Iraq. People really care about us."

Knowing how instrumental ties to



Members of Wisconsin Valley Branch 3 keep children entertained during a special event held for families of deployed troops.

family, friends, and country are during an extended time away from home, a call to support those serving overseas went out to National Mutual Benefit branches. A list of ideas for projects to help improve the quality of life for our troops and their families was included. In response, NMB members rallied to provide support for our servicemen and women in their time of need.

What Our Branches Have Done

We are proud to highlight some of the projects that NMB branches organized in their local communities to support those in military service.

- On two consecutive JOIN HANDS DAYS, Wisconsin Valley (WI) Branch 3 held events to support our troops and their families. In 2003, the branch partnered with the Wausau Area Hmong Association to sponsor a fun day for families of deployed service people. They had games and crafts for the children, served lunch, and created cards to send overseas. In 2004, they



Sue Loudon and Helen Fuchs of Sheboygan Branch 630 put branch labels on items that have been collected for Wisconsin military personnel stationed in Iraq.



David Weinknecht, an NMB member and former Sergeant in the Marine Corps, was instrumental in organizing the Branch 630 project and helping to send out supplies and maintain contacts.

provided funding for and helped plant new shrubbery and grass seed at the home of a serviceman and his family. The family had recently purchased the home only to find out that same month that the father was being called to active duty in Afghanistan.

- Shiocton (WI) Branch 882 members, along with the Boys and Girls Club of Fox Valley, honored the troops in Iraq on JOIN HANDS DAY 2004. The youth and adults created "Thank You" cards to mail to military personnel.
- Sheboygan (WI) Branch 630 showed its support by sponsoring a project to collect supplies to send to Wisconsin units currently serving in Iraq. General necessities such as shaving cream, soap, sunscreen, envelopes, notepads, batteries, snacks, and drink mixes were collected. The branch had the

help of a military veteran to package and ship the items to Iraq.

- Hettinger (ND) Branch 81 used an NMB Community Outreach grant to purchase supplies, put together care packages, and send the items to troops in Iraq.
- Antigo (WI) Branch 27 is purchasing and donating long distance phone cards so troops can call loved ones and friends back home.
- Members in Independence, Wisconsin, have been selling patriotic ribbons to raise money for care packages. They also invited Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops and 4-H Clubs to make Christmas cards to send overseas and to organize activities to raise money to purchase calling cards.

What You Can Do

It is our hope that what NMB branches are doing to support our troops will help inspire you, your family, and/or neighbors to help a specific soldier, a unit based in your hometown, or families of those called to duty overseas. Here are some sources of information and ideas to get you started.

- Visit the United Service Organizations Web site (www.uso.org) to see how you can help troops get free call-

ing cards or donate recycled cell phones to Veterans Advantage (www.veteransadvantage.com) for soldiers to reach their loved ones.

- Visit the Operation Gratitude Web site (www.opgratitude.com) to find out how you can donate items to be put in a care package or make a monetary donation to send supplies to the troops.
- Ask your local American Red Cross chapter about Treasures for Troops. For \$20 they will ship a fun care package filled with treats and games to a service member.
- Make your own care packages with nonperishable food items, games, cards, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Write letters and "Thank You" cards.
- Send your local newspaper and newsletters to soldiers from your hometown to keep them up to date.
- Contact a local military unit in your area to find out how to send cards and care packages to troops overseas.

Share Your Ideas

If you have already put together a project or have a great idea to lift the spirits of military personnel or their families, share it with us by sending an e-mail to bennyb@nmbfrat.org. ♦



Holding up greeting cards they made to send overseas are members of Shiocton Branch 882 and the Boys and Girls Club of Fox Valley.