

Holiday cards will help warm serving soldiers' hearts



This Monday, Canadians from coast to coast will pause at the eleventh hour to remember those who have fallen during wartime.

As they do so, they will stand and reflect alongside nearly 100,000 full-time and reservist members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are willing to put themselves in harm's way for Queen and Country.

As you pause and reflect during the week ahead, consider setting your thoughts down on paper in a holiday card for soldiers serving overseas and here at home.

Aurora resident Dianne Harrison is once again collecting holiday cards to send to soldiers around the world, hoping to collect enough to brighten the season for more than 4,500 members. It might seem like a drop in the bucket, she says, considering the full complement of the Canadian Army, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Royal Canadian Air Force, and other branches of service, but every card will touch a heart.

"Our troops need to know that we are thinking of them at this special time of year and the sacrifices they are making not being at home with their families," says Ms. Harrison. "They sacrifice so much and I think sometimes we just take it for granted. We look around the world and see what's happening and we're in such a wonderful, safe place. I think we forget because we're not bombed, we don't have the poverty that other countries have, and most of us probably couldn't imagine how [our soldiers] are living. It's time for us to give back and I think this is just a small token of how we can give back and say thank you."

Each year, Ms. Harrison sets to work raising awareness of this card-writing campaign by taking the message to local schools and leaving drop boxes at various locations around town, including Town Hall, the Aurora Public Library, and local recreation centres like the Aurora Family Leisure

Complex and the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex.

This year's campaign is well underway and has, so far, received a tremendous uptake from social media ? not just here in Aurora, but also in Nova Scotia, Alberta and British Columbia.

Where there are not drop boxes, Ms. Harrison's dedication to the cause is such that she is willing to pick them up, if given enough notice. The first batch of cards will be collected for shipment on November 17, with the second and final collection taking place on December 8.

This year, in addition to sending cards to Canadian Forces bases in Afghanistan, Bahrain and Jerusalem, she is expanding their reach and distributing cards to bases here at home, including CFB Borden, CFB Petawawa, and a number of other bases out west.

The only requirement is that the messages are heartfelt. Soldiers, says Ms. Harrison, love to hear about what's happening in the card-writers' lives, regardless of age, within their communities, and what matters to them.

?You might think it is a small gesture here, but it is a very big gesture there,? she says. ?It shows love and compassion, and that we love and care about them. I just wish we could do something all year round, like be able to drop of 100 cards at the post office on Father's Day, Mother's Day and Easter.?

For more information on the letter writing campaign, including additional drop-off locations and how to arrange a pick-up, email Dianne Harrison at bdharrison2012@gmail.com. Remember to include your name, address and email because you never know who will write back.

By Brock Weir