

Save your holiday cards for next year?s Christmas Greetings for Soldiers effort



As the holidays draw ever-closer, if you're a person who does such things, your Christmas cards were likely already in the mail a week or two ago.

But, if you have any cards left over after your family and friends were taken care of, don't throw them out ? consider donating them to Aurora's Dianne Harrison who will make sure the cards put smiles on the faces of some of the people who need them the most next season.

Despite a brief hiccup due to contracting COVID-19 at the start of the month, Ms. Harrison and her husband, Brian, made their annual trek to their local postal depot laden down with dozens of shoeboxes filled with Christmas cards written to members of the Canadian Armed Forces stationed at home and abroad.

Inspired by their late friend Vhonda Harper, the mother of a man who served in Afghanistan, who led the card-writing campaign in her final years, the Harrisons have picked up the torch and, for the better part of 15 years, have ensured soldiers receive a little extra something to open on Christmas Day.

Under their stewardship, the initiative has seen traction all over Ontario and this year is no exception.

?The other day we mailed 7,650 cards and will probably have another 1,000 to go out on Monday,? Ms. Harrison told The Auroran on Friday. ?There are also 250 residents and military at Sunnybrook Hospital and we're driving 260 cards down there because we want to make sure we have a card for everybody.?

This year's campaign can be summed up in one word, she said: ?Wonderful.?

Of the more than 8,000 cards and drawings ? from participants ranging from a crayon-wielding three-year-old to a 90-year-old who probably found something less waxy to write with ? all messages came straight from the heart in appreciation for the services intended recipients provide in the name of King and Country.

?The messages this year were from the heart because they know what the military is going through and everything was sent with respect, dedication and caring ? it was really beautiful,? says Ms. Harrison. ?The number of drawings we got from kids who were three or four years old is great because how do you know if a soldier is not going to be a mum or a dad of a three-year-old.?

Helping make this year's campaign such a success, she says, was an assist from the Optimist Club of Aurora, who not only helped distribute cards locally but also secured the support of their counterparts in Barrie who sent in a further 1,000 ? with more coming

from communities as varied as Chatham and Mitchell.

?We didn't get as many cards from schools as we had in the past because of the pending possible strike and a lot of the schools jumped in at the last moment,? she adds. ?If we got the volume from schools, we probably would have gone over 9,000.?

They may have had to take a couple of days off due to the virus, but they didn't let that get in their way, with Ms. Harrison adding, ?At this time of year we can't get sick; there is too much to do. This is something that must be done. The military knows that we miss them here at home and we care about them.

?This coming year what I'm asking is if people have a card left at the end of 2022, put them aside. Even if people just have one or two cards that would be phenomenal. We have no idea how these cards will touch soldiers' hearts. The senders are blessed and so is the receiver.?

If you have leftover cards to contribute to their mission, contact Brian and Dianne Harrison at bdharrison2012@gmail.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter