

Thousands of Christmas cards collected for soldiers ? amid a call for change



By Brock Weir

Each card put a smile on Dianne Harrison's face.

The Aurora resident has been busily distributing and collecting Christmas Cards for people across southern Ontario ? and beyond ? to fill out and send to men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces since the beginning of this fall.

With an initial goal of 3,000 cards this year, Ms. Harrison collected a whopping 4,737.

That's a lot of work for the smiling muscles ? but that smile turned into disappointment as the 2017 Christmas Card program came to a close this year when she learned many others looking to write to soldiers this Christmas were no longer able to do so free of charge.

While Ms. Harrison's Christmas Card Initiative was able to get out in the post thanks to the Royal Canadian Legion, slightly late to ensure delivery to the soldiers by Christmas due to some technical transit wrangling, she says the opportunity to write should be available year-round.

'Why, as citizens, can't we do this??' she questions. 'We care for our military too, and their families. It shouldn't be just at Christmas that we tell them we're thinking about them. Their families give up so much for them and they give up so much for their families and our country. I believe there should be a change in legislation, there needs to be a big change.'

This is a view supported by the Royal Canadian Legion

'I was in dialogue with the Department of National Defence a month and a half ago and they basically said [their policy] had changed recently,' said Ken White, President of the Aurora Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. 'Family to family members are good to go, but non-family members to the military have to pay. I said, 'Look, if it is about the money, we'll pay for it, don't worry about that,' but I said that it seems to be a little slummish.

'We're going to try and get it changed and I am certainly going to recommend it when we talk to the base commander, but I think what we need to do is start sending these cards out earlier. If we can get on it earlier in the season, there will be lots of time to get there before December 25.'

It doesn't, however, take much time for the smile to return to Ms. Harrison's face. Although the majority of the Christmas Cards won't arrive to various places Canadian soldiers are serving around the world until New Year's, or just after, she is buoyed by the enthusiasm which greeted this season's card collection.

'We have a lot of excitement going on and people are really eager to take part because they know these cards mean so much to the military,' she says. 'When people, especially kids, hear back from the soldiers, it builds real momentum. It is sad they won't receive their cards by Christmas because I know those who are not at home are feeling a loss not being with their families and wondering if we really do care about them here. I feel bad they don't know there are all these cards just waiting for them, full of love, saying that we care about them.'