

Volunteers offer more than words

Area commanders praise local groups for support of soldiers, families

BY PAMELA E. WALCK

912-652-0363

pamela.walck@savannahnow.com

Soldiers assigned to Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield often offer high praise for the community supporting the installations.

It's rare to get stationed in a community that supports soldiers more, they say.

People will pay for meals, thank them in passing, or deck out their vehicles in yellow ribbons.

They also give their time and money.

It's a level of support that has grabbed the attention of high-ranking brass — whether stationed here or just passing through.

When Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited

HOW TO HELP

- For more information about Adopt-A-Soldier or to host soldiers recently returning from Iraq during the holidays, contact Carol Megathlin at carol.megathlin@comcast.net.
- For more information about The Landings Military Family Relief Fund, contact Jack Munroe at 912-598-9722.



Cucolo

When Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo arrived to take the helm as commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, the level of com-

Fort Stewart in June, he was quick to praise community efforts for embracing the installations' soldiers. Among them, he mentioned Adopt-a-Soldier, which partners area residents with troops who are deploying to war.

munity support impressed him — so much so that he made a presentation on several programs, including The Landings Military Family Relief Fund and Adopt-a-Soldier, at October's Association of the U.S. Army's annual convention in Washington, D.C.

Volunteers welcome the attention but find it slightly embarrassing.

"Nobody is looking for any glory here," said Jack Munroe, president of

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The Landings fund. "It's just so satisfying to be able to help."

In September, Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch, Cucolo's predecessor, sent a hand-written note to Munroe vowing to start a similar program at his new station at Fort Hood, Texas.

"So many folks say, 'We support our troops' but do nothing," Lynch wrote. "You all not only said the words, but do the deeds. Inspirational!"

Strong words for a group that didn't exist two years ago.

Munroe said it started with a group of volunteers, living in the retirement community, who volunteered to send off and welcome home soldiers at Hunter Army Airfield.

It was that exposure, coupled



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Carol Megathlin, 3rd ID Adopt-a-Soldier coordinator

with commanders' stories of soldiers' families going in need while their loved ones were deployed, that started tugging at heartstrings.

"It all started with 100 volunteers that just go out and serve the troops and welcome them home. We're not the only group that's doing that, either," Munroe said.

Since April 2007, the group has collected \$296,593 — mostly from neighborhood residents who carefully disperse the money to families with special needs, from food

and diapers to vehicles and home repairs.

"We're close to \$300,000 in collections now," he said. "I think people really want to help the soldiers, people want to support the military, but they don't really know how."

Similarly, since its formal founding in March 2007, Adopt-a-Soldier has more than 2,000 volunteers who have taken on more than 5,000 troops leaving from Hunter Army Airfield.

"That's a modest estimate," said Carol Megathlin, the 3rd ID Adopt-a-Soldier coordina-

tor. "I think that basically ... people want to support the troops."

"After people get into the program, they find that they get such a sense of satisfaction and reward for giving to the soldiers"

Megathlin is now working with residents, through the American Red Cross, to connect National Guardsmen from Texas and Indiana with residents in those states.

"I think the American people want to help and want to make a sacrifice," she said. "We're just a portal to help them get in."

And it's that fine line between wanting to help and doing something about it that makes a difference, according to commanders.

"In the nomadic life of a soldier, (these programs say) we want to make it as good as possible," Cucolo said.