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## Project Hero Seeking Assistance of Charleston-Area Residents

*Jun-16-2011*

Eastern Illinois University is reaching out to the Charleston-area community for its assistance in making Project Hero a rousing success.

Since the spring, students, faculty and staff have properly folded and placed in small bags 8½- by 11-inch American flags. Many individuals also wrote brief messages, thanking an unknown serviceman for his/her bravery and service.

According to Michael Ruybal, EIU's veterans service coordinator, those flags and messages will soon be sent to men and women in the Armed Forces here in Illinois and to the units they are deployed with overseas in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. His goal, he says, is to send 1,000 "care packages," each measuring 6 inches long, 4 inches wide and 4 inches high.

"No, that's not very big," Ruybal affirms. But the retired serviceman, who spent 13 years in active duty in the U.S. Army, knows by experience just how much the simplest kindness from home can raise a soldier's morale.

The flags, he added, will be small enough for the recipients to easily carry in their pockets or packs with their military gear.

In addition, the care packages will randomly contain other small "comfort" items, not readily found in those areas in which many servicemen are deployed. Suggested items include, but may not be limited to:

- Small bags of candy, including jelly beans
- Small bottles of foot powder
- Baby wipes
- Small toys that can be given to children (e.g., Hot Wheels, plush animals, stress balls, etc.)
- Packets of instant coffee
- Small bags of potato chips
- Instant drink packages that are already sweetened
- AA-cell Alkaline batteries
- Eye wash/drops for flushing dust and sand out of the eyes
- Hot sauce (e.g., Tabasco, Red Devil, etc.). Small bottle placed in doubled zip-lock bags.
- Sunflower seeds
- Peanuts
- Small bags of beef jerky/Slim Jims

"These care packages will brighten the day of any man or woman who proudly and humbly serves our country," Ruybal said. "Something as simple as a cup of instant coffee or a bag of candy puts a big smile on their face."

Additionally, each package will contain a message from EIU, thanking the recipient for his/her service and welcoming them to look at Eastern as a source for higher education.

"I'm not sure what the outcome will be," Ruybal said, commenting on the packages' use as a recruiting tool. "But at least we're letting them know that Eastern supports them while they're out in the field and that we'll continue to support them here in our community."

The 36-year-old said he plans on sending the 1,000 care packages out near the end of June. That leaves only two weeks, he added, to finish collecting donations and getting the packages ready for delivery.

Currently, donation boxes are set up in four different locations in Charleston : Rural King, Wal-Mart, Starbucks and Old Main (the "Castle"), Room 1211, on Eastern's campus.





*These collection boxes, designed by Michael Ruybal, stand awaiting donations from area residents for Project Hero. The boxes can be found at Rural King, Wal-Mart, Starbucks and in Old Main (the "Castle") on EIU's campus.*

"I know not everyone can give 1,000 of any given item," Ruybal said. "I'd just like to ask folks who are out and about shopping over the next couple of weeks to please keep our troops in mind."

In addition to any personal notes of encouragement the public may like to include to a random serviceman, monetary donations are also being accepted to help defray the costs of supplies. Checks, made payable to the Student Veterans of Eastern, can be sent in care of the Financial Aid Office, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920.