



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
316th SUSTAINMENT COMMAND (EXPEDITIONARY)
99 SOLDIERS LANE
CORAOPOLIS, PA 15108-2550



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PRESS RELEASE:

Soldiers, students spread holiday cheer to local veterans

CORAOPOLIS, Pa. (January 13, 2010) – The halls resounded with holiday tunes as local students caroled room to room. Local soldiers sported a modified military uniform, complete with elf hats and boots, as they distributed gift packages to patients. As Santa followed along, ringing bells and spreading holiday cheer, it became clear that this was not a typical Army or school day. But it was how two organizations decided to thank local veterans for their service this holiday season.

Approximately 30 Army Reserve soldiers from the 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command here put time aside time recently to visit patients at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's Heinz Division. Accompanying them were fifth grade members of Bon Meade Elementary School's student council, Moon Township, Pa.

"You have no idea how much your visit meant to these veterans," said David C. DiFuccia, recreation therapy team leader at the VA.

More than 200 gift bags were put together at the Tech Sgt. Vernon McGarity United States Army Reserve Center here and filled with items donated from companies and individuals from around the local area, to include the Hillman Company, Operation Troop Appreciation, Military Family Network, local elementary schools, and 316th soldiers. The donations included items such as crossword puzzles, candy, games, personal hygiene items, shirts, hats, and even handwritten letters and cards.

At the end of the day, it was neither the gift bag nor the choir of young voices that left a lasting impression upon some of the service members.

"The best part of the day for me, were the smiles the people gave when they saw us," said Private 1st Class Taylor Kline, a soldier who graduated from basic training and Advanced Individual Training only weeks ago.

Many of the VA staff and veterans cheered, others cried, as the children and soldiers made their way around the facility. The event was an eye-opening experience for everyone.

"We were there to thank them (veterans) yet they were thanking us. These students came up with this idea, from their hearts, to give back to those who have already served...these are such great kids and they are doing such a wonderful job," said Jennifer Daugherty, PTC President, Moon Township, Pa.

Watching the children sing together in harmony brought tears to the parents eyes. While this was the first visit for the students, they hoped that it would not be their last.

"This was a great activity for student council. It was wonderful to see all the happy faces on the patients. I enjoyed the afternoon," said Megan Meneskie, fifth grade student and member of Bon Meade Elementary School's student council. "As soon as we left we started talking about how soon we could come back."



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As the final bag was distributed, the soldiers prepared to go back to work and the students returned to school.

Although the visit was short, it will leave a lingering presence in these halls.

“I have good news and bad news...the veterans here may not remember you, but tomorrow, they will talk about their families who were here today to give them presents or their grandchildren who were here to sing. Whether they remember you or not, you absolutely cheered them up and left a lasting impression. Thank you,” said DiFuccia.

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Coraopolis — Local students from Bon Meade Elementary School’s student council, Moon Township, Pa., pose with local Army Reserve soldiers from the 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command here during a trip to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System’s Heinz Division recently. Together, the students and soldiers distributed approximately 200 gift bags and treats to veterans while caroling holiday tunes and spreading holiday cheer.



Coraopolis — Army Reserve soldiers from the 316th Expeditionary Sustainment Command pose with a veteran during a trip to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System’s Heinz Division recently. The soldiers donned holiday costumes and distributed approximately 200 gift bags, filled with donations from local companies and individuals, to include the Hillman Company, Operation Troop Appreciation, Military Family Network, local elementary schools, and 316th soldiers.

Story and photos by Sgt. Crystal Adamosky, 316th ESC.

For high-res photos or additional information, contact Capt. Kevin McNamara at 412-507-3820 or email kevin.mcnamara@usar.army.mil.