

Here's the story:

Rotarians set up Platoon Partners

-- By Richard Schwartzman

For Eric Balcavage, a chiropractor and member of the Concordville-Chadds Ford Rotary, learning of the lack of personal items for U.S. troops serving in Iraq became a family matter. Balcavage has a brother serving as commander in the 501st Airborne, 1st Battalion in Iraq.

When he heard about the situation, Balcavage decided to take action by starting the Platoon Partners campaign. He said he was "appalled" to hear the soldiers couldn't even buy things such as toothpaste.

"They don't even have a PX where they can buy things. I e-mailed everyone on my e-mail contact list saying we need people to act as platoon coordinators," he said. Those coordinators would work with platoon leaders in Iraq to find out who needed what.

The campaign started Dec. 22 and by the second week in February 50 platoons in the 501st and the 509th airborne divisions were being tended to by sponsors acting as platoon coordinators. Balcavage estimates that to be more than 1,500 soldiers being helped getting toiletries and other personal items. The average platoon, he said, has about 30 members.

Some organizations, even municipalities such as Concord Township, have adopted platoons and set up drop boxes for donations of such things as toiletries and other personal items.

Balcavage has also enlisted the help of the Chadds Ford Business Association. he told the group last week that many of the personal items needed have been sent and they are now working to supply some comfort items such as books, magazines and CDs.

The campaign is similar to the Anysoldier.com project in Chadds Ford, but on a larger scale.

Balcavage said the soldiers in the 501st and 509th are in particularly bad positions, being in the unprotected red zone. Seven soldiers recently kidnapped, four of whom were killed, came from those divisions.

Members of the Rotary are helping the campaign by taking drop boxes for their various business locations, and a stock seminar sponsored by the group planned for March 13 will require a \$10 donation for the Platoon Partners program.

That seminar is open to non-Rotarians. For information contact Sam Snyder at 610-388-4591.

Platoon Partners was not the original name of the campaign. Balcavage first called it Adopt a Platoon, but had to change the name when he learned of a potential trademark infringement.