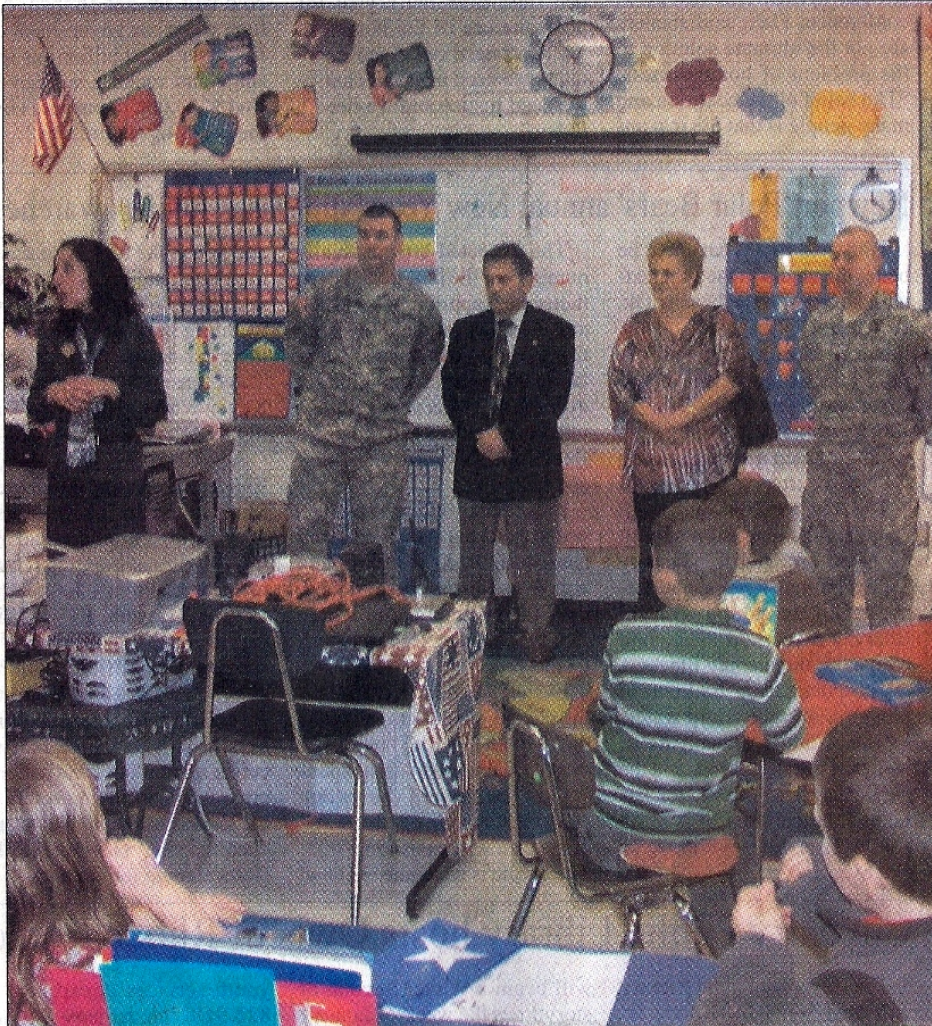


# Holiday care package for soldiers overseas



Jessica Selby/Daily Times

The students in Jessica O'Connell's second grade class at Washington Oak Elementary School made cards that will be heading overseas to out service men and women. Military personnel, Master Sgt. Keith Skuce and Sgt. First Class Jodi Dove were on hand to speak with the children about being away from family and friends during the holidays. Joseph Florio Jr. and Phyllis Gustafson, both members of the town council and the Sons of Italy were also present.

## The Sons of Italy and students send holiday cheer to those in military

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COVENTRY — The students at Washington Oak Elementary School have teamed up with members of the Sons of Italy to show their support to troops serving overseas this holiday season.

The students in Jessica O'Connell's second grade class at the school worked on creating holiday cards for soldiers serving overseas as a classroom project. O'Connell instructed the children on card making strategies and discussed with them possibilities for inscriptions.

Under their teacher's guidance, the students each made a card to send to the soldiers serving overseas this holiday season.

Kianna Hepburn, one of the students in O'Connell's class, said that her teacher provided suggestions to the students on what to write, but ultimately left it up to them to decide what the text and the illustrations in their cards would be. Hepburn said that she choose to write "Happy Holidays" and color a few different images on her double sided card.

All of the cards that were created by the students were collected last week by members of the Sons of Italy to be included with care packages that the organization makes every year at this time to send to soldiers serving overseas.

Joseph Florio Jr., a member of the Sons of Italy, who is also one of the newest members of the West Warwick School Committee, and Phyllis Gustafson, a member of the Sons of Italy, who is also a member of the West Warwick Town Council, visited Washington Oak School to see and talk to the kids and collect the cards that

they made for the program. They brought with them military personnel, Master Sgt. Keith Skuce and Sgt. First Class Jodi Dove, so that they could talk with the kids about what serving overseas during the holiday season is like and how receiving care packages such as this, which includes heartwarming hand made cards, makes such a difference.

"After spending a year in Afghanistan, and being there at Christmas time, I can truly tell you that letters like this go a long way," Dove said. "I received a bunch of letters from third and fourth graders from a school while I was there and even though they didn't know exactly who I was nor did I know exactly who they were, they really made us smile.

"When you're 7,000 miles away from home and things are so far from what you are used to, anything that reminds you of home and people that care and support you really help to being up your spirits," he said. "I really mean that because we did get some good stuff, like hand wipes, razors and even yellow cupcakes, and they were really good, but I can honestly say that the thing I enjoyed most was receiving those cards."

In hopes that their cards will make just as big of an impact on other soldiers, the students bundled all of their cards together and handed them over to Gustafson and Florio. The duo told the students that all of their cards are being packaged with various items purchased by the members of the Sons of Italy for the soldiers. Florio said that the members of the organization all made financial donations toward the care package project and that together with all of the donations, including an individual \$50 donation made by Gustafson, the organization had nearly \$300 to spend on the packages.

Florio said that he and several other members of the organization went out this week and purchased items based on suggestions made by both Skuce and Dove. The soldiers explained to both Flo-

rio and Gustafson as well as the students, that the items that they send over to the soldiers do not have to be brand new items exclusively for the soldiers. In fact, he said, at certain times of the year, like the holidays, the soldiers receive so many items that they often give much of it to the young Afghan children that cross the soldier's paths in travels.

"Afghanistan is a very, very poor country and the kids really don't have anything there," Dove said. "I have to tell you that those kids are very grateful what we do for them and give to them.

"Shoes, for example, are a big item and stuffed animals too, they

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