

The Governor General's Caring Canadian Award



Barbara Joan McMurray

West Hill, Ontario

When Joan McMurray learned that a former colleague's son had been deployed to Afghanistan, she didn't know she was starting a project that would touch the lives of 5,400 Canadian soldiers.



A retired librarian, Mrs. McMurray wanted to do something to help her friend Elaine's son, Allen. After sending Elaine a note expressing support, she asked if Allen would like to receive a care package. Elaine liked the idea and suggested a list of items he might like to get. She also asked him to supply the names of other soldiers, and the idea snowballed from there.

"When I told my daughter and grandson I was shopping for items for a soldier in Kandahar, they wanted to help fill the box," recalls Mrs. McMurray. "Then I thought perhaps my family and friends might be interested and they too wanted to send a package. They in turn told their friends and co-workers they were sending packages and soon their peers asked how they could participate.

"Soldiers' names were assigned to sponsors and through word of mouth more soldiers expressed interest. Sponsors came forward eager to show our troops that Canadians cared and that is how the Chosen Soldier Project was born."

Chosen Soldier proved amazingly successful. The parcels, described as the size of a case of 24 beers by the soldiers, contained items much sought-after in Afghanistan, including lip balm ('like gold to soldiers'), beef jerky, gum, playing cards and wet wipes, which soldiers used to stay clean when on patrol for days at a time. One enterprising soldier got together with members of his platoon and came up with a list of treats they missed the most. The most popular items? Chocolate chip cookies, apple pie, macaroni and cheese, cereal, chips, candy, even V-8 and veggie chips for the health-conscious.

But it wasn't just food and treats. The soldiers also wanted letters and emails, which helped greatly in maintaining morale. The soldiers reciprocated, writing back to their sponsors with appreciation. As for Mrs. McMurray, she received a Canadian flag that had flown over Canada House in Kandahar, along with a certificate that read 'From the men and women of the Canadian Forces in Kabul'.

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Barbara Joan McMurray, recipient

Louise Jarvis, who nominated Mrs. McMurray for the Caring Canadian Award says, "Joan worked diligently to make the project a success by finding sponsors to fulfil the wish lists of Canadian soldiers serving our country." Befitting a true volunteer, Mrs. McMurray reserves her praise for the sponsors. "You stepped up to the challenge, choosing to accept a soldier as one of your own. You came from all walks of life. Together, we made it happen!"



The Caring Canadian Award was presented to Barbara Joan McMurray on April 17, 2012, at Rideau Hall. Sgt Ronald Duchesne 2012 © Rideau Hall