

Community rallies to send poignant cards to soldiers

If this were an ordinary year, people from across the community, including students sitting at their desks, would be diligently setting pen to paper ? or, more accurately, setting pen to card.

As has been the case year in and year out for more than decade, they weren't Christmas wish lists or class assignments; rather, they were poignant holiday greetings for members of the Canadian Armed Forces stationed at home and abroad who would likely be away from their families during the festive season.

But, as we know, this isn't an ordinary year.

Dropping off ? and picking up ? cards and notes from such places as schools, seniors' centres and businesses ? is, of course, a more difficult process, but that isn't stopping Aurora's Dianne Harrison from making sure thousands of cards are sent off this month for their intended recipients ? from places as varied as York, Peel and South Simcoe.

?I believe our military has had one of the toughest years,? says Ms. Harrison. ?They have had to pivot in so many situations with COVID. They're in different countries right now and we really have no idea what our military is up against with COVID going rampant. It is our duty as Canadians to honour these people. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't have our freedom. It is up to us to teach our children.?

Now in its 15th year, Ms. Harrison spends this season of Remembrance hard at work raising awareness for this card-writing campaign.

Her goal is to distribute thousands of blank holiday cards to various locations, pick them back up and deliver them free of charge through the Forces all around the world. She visits countless schools throughout York Region and surrounding communities distributing not only cards but also colourfully-decorated drop boxes in public places to make the process as easy and visible as possible for anyone hoping to participate.

In 2018, she set a target of distributing 2,000 cards to Canadian service personnel and collected a whopping 6,500. Last year she collected close to 10,000 messages.

There were high hopes for this year's targets, but COVID-19 got in the way.

?This year, we had 7,500 cards donated to us,? says Ms. Harrison. ?So many people have stepped up to bat this year because they know it is a difficult time. If we send out 3,000 or 5,000, regardless of what we send out, we're going to make it work this year. It has to work.?

Still, it can't do that without your help.

?It is important for mom and dad to sit with their kids and do cards because how do you know the person at the receiving end of these cards doesn't have a child at home? This just brings joy to them. You are thanking them ? and most people who are out there probably have families and they are not going to see them for Christmas, so this is just a way to let them know we are a caring and loving country that has respect and honour for our military.

?During COVID, people have the time to write a card. You can't tell me you don't have the time. You can take a half-hour out of your day and leave the TV and phones alone and instead of spending your time on social media take 30 minutes and thank our military.?

For more information on writing holiday cards for Canadian soldiers, including the drop-off and pick-up of blank and completed

cards, contact Dianne Harrison at bdharrison2012@gmail.com. The first batch of cards will be delivered to the Canadian Armed Forces on November 20, with a final round on November 30.

By Brock Weir