Azle Scouts collecting gift kits for US soldiers

Community support sought

BY EDWIN NEWTON

Two Boy Scouts, 2,200 miles away, share the same goal.

They want to make life easier for American troops serving in Afghanistan.

A few weeks ago, Azle Boy Scout Michael Goldstein heard about a fellow scout from Eagle Point, Oregon, who had come up with a special way to help soldiers serving abroad.

Bryce Thornton, a Boy Scout in Eagle Point, Oregon, was able to help send over 5,000 pounds of products to troops overseas at Christmas time. He feels that with community support, Azle scout Michael Goldstein can can do the same thing.

Bryce Thornton, 11, had heard about Karen Anderson, a soldier friend of his father, Darrin, who was serving in Afghanistan. Bryce found out that soldiers overseas are often deprived of basic things that most folks in America take for granted. So he – with a lot of help from his dad and his community – hatched a plan to raise about $16,000 in cash – money he then used to buy those special items for the soldiers. The special grocery list included items like batteries, hair brushes, dozens of cases of ramen noodles and loads of beef jerky. The product – 5,350 pounds of it – was then shipped via the US Postal Service to soldiers in Afghanistan just before Christmas.

"It gave me a good feeling to do that," Bryce said. "They needed something more than the government could give them – and we were able to help."

Michael Goldstein, a member of Azle Pack 243, wants to do the same thing from Azle.

Aided by his dad, assistant scout master Gary Goldstein, Michael is trying to come up with about 300 kits that would be shipped to soldiers in Afghanistan – the heart of the United States' military involvement.

Right now the focus is on soldier requests – magazines, books snacks such as beef jerky, drink mix, etc. Even some first aid kits.

"We are focusing on comforts the would not normally have," Gary said. "I think a realistic goal would be 300 – but we'd love to exceed."

Just as the Thornton's found out, the success of the program will depend on how well the community supports it.

In Bryce's case, the town of Eagle Point, the nearby city of Medford and seemingly the entire state of Oregon seemed to get involved. An Oregon senator even got involved.

The Goldsteins realize that collecting such support around Christmastime – the annual season of giving – is easier than mid-Spring. But they are no less determined to help who they can.

The Goldsteins and their local Boy Scout brethren will be relying on support from local businesses for some donations. Some of the larger supermarket chains would be logical request stops.

In essence, they're going to be talking with anybody that will listen.

"I'm just asking around – seeing if anyone can help," Michael said. "It's kind of hard – asking people – but I know it's for a good cause."

Michael remains optimistic that people will listen.

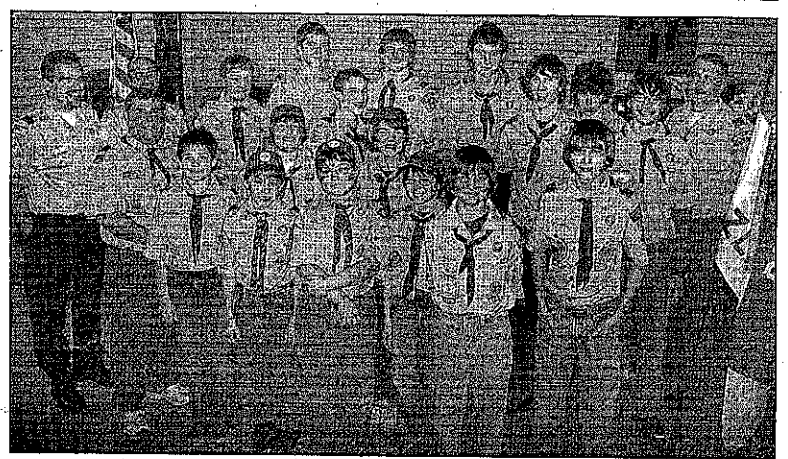
"There are lots of families that have a soldier in their family," he said. "I think they would like to help."

Gary agrees.

"We know people form scouts who are either serving or have relatives who serve," he said. "People do not thank our service personnel enough, so this is a way he could help out and say 'thanks'"

Gary admits that the project is a huge endeavor – even for a seasoned Eagle Scout – which Michael has yet to become. But he feels the project "exemplifies the global nature of scouting" and "how there is a strong 'scout' bond across long distances."

Michael will also be able to use the experience as part of his Bar Mitzvah project. A Bar Mitzvah is an opportunity for 13 year old Jewish youth to lead religious services and read from the Torah (Bible). It signifies his "coming of age," Gary said. Each Mitzvah youth picks a service project. This one is Michael's.



Michael Goldstein, center front, and his Boy Scout Troop 243 are looking for help from the community as they attempt to put together 300 care packages for troops in Afghanistan. Donations can be dropped off at Prosperity Bank or at the *Azle News* office. Photo by Edwin Newton

A donation account has already been set up at Prosperity Bank in Azle. Donations can be made out to "Pack 243 Scouts with reference to "Military Care Package."

Currently, drop off points will be Prosperity Bank and the Azle News, with Gary willing to make numerous trips in between. Michael will be in charge of managing the inventory.

For more information, or to get involved, call Scout Michael Goldstein or Committee Chair Gary Goldstein at 817-448-0186 or Edwin Newton at the *Azle News* at 817-270-3340.

Michael would like to have the kits ready for shipment to Afghanistan by mid June, with a July 4th arrival date.

Gary said community involvement is the key.

"If this is Michael's project, it will be somewhat successful," he said. "If Michael drives an 'Azle community project, it will be a huge success. This is Michael's goal – to inspire our area to help out."

Bryce said he believes that the Azle boy and his community can achieve their goal.

"I think if they put their mind to it – they can do it," he said.

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