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Honor and comfort

Rotarians gather to support troops

By Francesca Chilargi
, The News-Herald

A self-dubbed proud military mom is bracing herself for the possibility that her youngest son could be deployed overseas.

Lori Pate of La Salle backs her son, Dennis Pate, who followed his aspirations by joining the Marine Corps on April 3. He is stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Pate is president of Operation Quiet Comfort, a nonprofit organization founded by her family that backs troops and medical professionals abroad by sending care packages.

"There are a lot of things that our troops can benefit from that are not military issued," Pate said. "No. 1 is the love and comfort of a loving nation.

"I would be lying if I couldn't tell you that I am prouder than I could ever be, but at the same time, I am scared to death."

To continue shipping care packages, or "go bags," containing quilts, personal care products, CD players, CDs and fresh-scented linens to troops at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and other medical facilities abroad, monetary donations are essential.

Providing that aid is Rotary Club District 6400, with "Honor and Comfort, A Benefit Dinner To Support Our Troops."

The dinner, which is expected to draw 1,000 people, will run from 5:30 to 10 p.m. Oct. 24 at Crystal Gardens, 16703 Fort St., Southgate. Tickets cost \$35 in advance or \$40 the day of the event.

Regardless of how people perceive the Iraq war, that should not sway support of U.S. fighters, said Larry Wright, a Taylor Rotary Club member.

"That's part of the message," said Wright, co-chairman of the benefit dinner "You can have your own opinion, but we can never, never lose the recognition that our troops deserve, regardless of political views of the war,"

Trenton City Clerk Kyle Stack, a member of Trenton's Rotary Club, also is a

co-chairwoman of the benefit dinner.

The night will feature live and silent auctions and prizes.

Because the Rotary clubs are heavily involved in community projects and it's not structured to directly help troops, the fund-raiser dinner is the next-best approach, organizers believe.

A survivor from the World Trade Center terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and a wounded veteran returning from overseas will discuss their experiences.

While elected officials were invited to the fund-raiser, no politicians will speak at the function.

"Our event will be nonpolitical and nonpartisan, and it's solely to support the troops," Wright said.

All proceeds will fund several nonprofit organizations that aid various needs of soldiers and their families.

Besides Operation Quiet Comfort, other groups are Michigan Military Moms, Hero Miles-Fisher House Foundation, Anysolider.com, Military Connection and America Supports You.

The goal is to gather \$100,000, which might seem lofty, but considering the countless expenses each organization has, it's not, organizers say.

Rotary members also want to aid military families who might be facing financial challenges.

"When they are on active duty, that means they leave their jobs," Stack said. "Instead of having that income from their employer, they have to rely on a much-reduced income from the government. In some cases, that creates a hardship for the families."

The cost to send the boxes for Operation Quiet Comfort depends on weight and volume, but it is in the thousands of dollars.

Medical personnel, like the troops, are subjected to constant mental stress and hardships, Pate said. They could use "tender love and care" by also receiving shipments, she added.

"As an American, I know fully well that we owe our defenders of all generations everything we can give them and then some," she said. "And, we have not always done that.

"Our medical professionals are saving lives ... 98 percent of warriors live. But they are coming home, and we need to be thinking of them."

Operation Quiet Comfort also takes special projects under its wings. One was giving 158 combat Marines serving in Iraq black sweat clothes to don in chilly weather at night, grooming and underclothing kits and healthy snacks.

"The project is structured so that we and they have integrity and trust of what we are sending over there," Pate said. "We know the items are meaningful and useful, and it's packaged so that they get there in good shape and they are able to use them right away."

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