

Valley Baptist Employee Helps Adopt-a-Platoon



Stationed at a remote Middle East base during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Vince Randazzo was surprised when his Air Force squadron received care packages sent by kindhearted strangers in the United States. “It was the coolest thing that said that the people back home were thinking about us. In the desert, having those extras definitely meant something to us,” the veteran said. “We wrote back to say we appreciated their thoughts and their blessings.” Far from home, the men shared the cookies, magazines, and good wishes inside the packages and never forgot the kindness.

Many years later, Vince Randazzo, working with Human Resources Information Services at Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen, found a way to repay the support and thoughtfulness he had experienced when deployed overseas. At a monthly system-wide forum, Valley Baptist Health System CEO James Eastham challenged Randazzo and other employees to find a way to show support for active troops and veterans.

Randazzo began researching ways of getting care packages to military in the field. Adopt-a-Platoon, he discovered, is a Rio Hondo non-profit organization that sends over 200,000 care packages to troops annually. Its founder, Ida Hägg, started the program when her son was stationed in Bosnia 13 years ago, and he asked his mother’s assistance to get mail and packages to the men who received nothing from home. “Ida, a former teacher, is very passionate about the troops overseas and Adopt-a-Platoon. She wears her heart on her sleeve,” Randazzo said. “I wanted us to partner with her, particularly because Adopt- a- Platoon is a local organization. I was thrilled that Valley Baptist could help out.”

After touring the Adopt-a-Platoon facility, Randazzo saw the need for donations to pay for the contents of the care packages and to mail them. Fully motivated, he set up a program last fall at Valley Baptist that would peak on Veterans Day. Valley Baptist employees donated over \$2,000 at three different levels of contributions. Sales of Adopt-a-Platoon hooded sweat shirts

raised an additional \$900. “I was able to cast a wide net at Valley Baptist,” he said, and got a heart-warming response. Hospital employees raised enough to put together and mail over 100 care packages valued at \$28 each. Care package contents ranged from granola bars and beef jerky to hand sanitizers, toiletries, socks, playing cards, seasonal items, and, of course, cookies.”

“What everybody thought was the best thing was the toothbrush package. Every soldier got a toothbrush with a note from the donor, from someone who cares,” Randazzo explained. “I didn’t want this to be just a program about raising money. I wanted it to be about people taking time to participate.” Randazzo’s wife, a teacher, gave him the idea to tap into the school systems. Several hundred children wrote letters to the soldiers and they were put into the care packages. He created drop boxes at Harlingen and Brownsville campuses for people to drop in cards and letters to send to the troops. Contributors could select the military unit to receive their support or they can allow Adopt a Platoon to make the selection based on need.

Not long after the care packages went out, the responses from the troops began coming in. It was obvious that today’s troops feel the same way Randazzo did about the gift packages sent by caring American.

“They are very touching, the emails and letters,” he said. “Some of them are from unit commanders and others are from individuals.” They say thank you for believing in us and what we do. That helped energize Randazzo and fellow volunteers to prepare for the next Adopt-a-Platoon campaign supporting our troops on the front lines. This month he spearheaded the “Adopt-a-Platoon” Independence Day Campaign at Valley Baptist. Randazzo set a goal of \$10,000 – in order to send to send 358 care packages to six platoons in the Middle East.

“We are trying to do our part to make this Fourth of July a reminder to our soldiers they are not forgotten,” Randazzo says. Beginning June 1st and running through July 4th, Randazzo and other employees at Valley Baptist are collecting donations for the overseas care packages. Donations are accepted at the Valley Baptist gift shops, on the first floor of the hospitals in Harlingen and Brownsville, as well as at First Community Bank locations at Valley Baptist-Harlingen and Valley Baptist-Brownsville. With fourteen days left in the campaign, he has exceeded the goal by raising over \$ 12,000. “I am overwhelmed by the generosity of the Valley Baptist employees and even more pleased that we will be able to serve more of our soldiers.”

Randazzo and his wife Gail are both originally from the Chicago area. His wife is a fourth grade teacher at Stuart Place Elementary School in Harlingen, where his youngest son, Jonathon, is a student. Their older son, Anthony, attends Vela Middle School.

Randazzo enjoys spending time with family and friends, wood working, and fishing in the Lower Laguna Madre.

