



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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'Tis The Season of Giving

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Generosity is powerful.

All throughout the year, I have seen so many people go out of their way to help their community, their family, friends and neighbors. It simply amazes me every time someone in our community does something that brings a smile to the face of another—even if it's someone they've never met and perhaps never will.

Back in October, I announced I was once again taking part in the 'Christmas Cards for Our Troops' program, which sends holiday greetings to troops deployed all over world, military members stationed away from home and veterans recovering in veteran's hospitals. It's a program that brings those smiles—with 300,000 or so cards delivered each year.

In previous years, I have seen people from all walks of life, men and women, the young and the young at heart, all join me in this effort. Local church groups, community groups, county clerks, local businesses, seniors, students and more all took the time to personally sign dozens, even hundreds of cards, and wish warm thoughts for the brave men and women who cannot be home with their families for the holidays.

This year I saw all of that and more. In all, through my offices in Oswego, St. Lawrence and Jefferson Counties, I collected more than 10,000 Christmas cards, which with the help of the Albany Veterans Miracle Center and Ogdensburg native and radio personality Melody Burns, made it into the hands of those soldiers who wanted nothing more than a small piece of home. I cannot thank you enough for helping make this happen.

Even after the deadline to drop off cards had passed, people continued bringing them in. Hundreds of those greeting cards were delivered to local organizations that support our troops, veterans and their families, including local VFWs, American Legion posts and the USO Fort Drum, among others.

But the giving didn't stop there. We saw hundreds of people come through our doors, many who donated cards, also dropped off their old cell phones. In addition to 'Christmas Cards for Our Troops', I also teamed up with a program called 'Cell Phones for Soldiers'. This program collects gently used cell phones and provides them, along with free calling cards, to soldiers and veterans. Since 2004, the group has provided more than 300,000,000 minutes of free talk time to our men and women in uniform.

As we know, military families live unique lives. The challenges they face are sometimes things we do not even think about. Something as simple as a phone call could be the best gift our soldiers and their families receive this holiday season.

Of course, it is often the things many of us take for granted that mean the most. This year, for the first time, the Ogdensburg Salvation Army wanted to host a Christmas dinner for those who may not have otherwise had anywhere to go. I joined them in collecting the food needed to ensure everyone who wanted one, had a hot, delicious, healthy meal on Christmas Day.

The Ogdensburg community also showed just how caring it can be. The St. Lawrence County Sheriff's Department contributed with numerous donations, including food. Deputy Mike Knowlton donated 30 turkeys. He also donated 15 more to the Massena Amvets for its dinner. Collins-Hammond Electric brought a check for \$200 to help cover other costs. Then of course, there were the people of Ogdensburg who, from food to money, did everything they could to pitch in as well.

While many spent Christmas at home, around the tree, enjoying time with family, they also took the time to make sure their neighbors, and soldiers making that sacrifice for us, will never be forgotten.

Generosity is indeed powerful.