



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Griffo, AT&T and CNY Veterans Outreach center kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO November 8, 2019

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UTICA – In honor of Veterans Day and Military Family Appreciation Month, Deputy Minority Leader Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, was joined by AT&T and the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center today to kick off the annual Cell Phones For Soldiers collection drive.

For every donated phone valued at \$5, Cell Phones For Soldiers is able to provide 2 ½ hours of free talk time to deployed troops via calling cards. All proceeds from the recycled devices will be used to buy long distance calling cards for troops at home and abroad. As many as 200,000 troops are serving in the U.S. military around the world and by donating to Cell Phones For Soldiers, local residents and businesses can provide a valuable lifeline for America's bravest men and women to connect with loved ones back home.

The collection drive starts today and runs through Sunday, Dec. 9. The public and businesses can drop off gently used and unwanted cell phones and/or tablets at collection bins in AT&T stores throughout the region and at several public locations throughout the senator's district. Those locations include:

- Adirondack Bank Center at Utica Memorial Auditorium: 400 Oriskany St. West, Utica
- Jervis Public Library: 613 N. Washington St., Rome
- Utica Public Library: 303 Genesee St., Utica
- Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica
- Peter's Cornucopia: 38 New Hartford Shopping Center, New Hartford
- Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., Utica
- Turning Stone Resort Casino: 5218 Patrick Road, Verona
- New Hartford Public Library: 2 Library Lane, New Hartford
- Lloyds of Lowville: 7405 S. State St., Lowville
- Lowville Free Library: 5387 Dayan St, Lowville
- Beaver River Memorial Post 1663: 9833 Main St., Croghan
- Sergi's Italian Restaurant: 10 Market St., Potsdam
- Town of Potsdam Offices: 18 Elm St., Potsdam

- Massena Public Library: 41 Glenn St, Massena

#### First Source Federal Credit Union

- 4451 Commercial Drive, New Hartford
- 1634 Genesee St., Utica
- 1822 Black River Boulevard, Rome

#### AT&T Stores

- 4777 Commercial Drive, New Hartford
- 1319 Erie Boulevard W., Rome
- 224 N. Genesee St., Utica

This is the fifth year that the drive has taken place. Residents throughout Deputy Minority Leader Griffo's district have donated approximately 3805 devices and have provided troops with approximately 171,225 minutes over the last four years.

"The upcoming holidays are an especially hard time for our soldiers overseas to be so far away from their families, and the simple sound of a loved one's voice can go a long way to lift up their spirits," Deputy Minority Leader Griffo said. "These brave men and women have stepped up to serve our nation, and so I am proud to once again team up with AT&T, the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center and Cell Phones for Soldiers to help connect these troops to their families back home."

Cell Phones For Soldiers was founded in 2004 by teenagers Robbie and Brittany Bergquist at the ages of 12 and 13. The charity has since provided more than 300 million minutes of free talk time to servicemen and women stationed around the world through its calling card program, Minutes That Matter. Funds raised from the recycling of cellular phones are used to purchase prepaid international calling cards. On average, Cell Phones For Soldiers distributes 1,500 calling cards each week to bases around the world, care package programs, deployment ceremonies and VA hospitals. Since 2004, Cell Phones For Soldiers has provided U.S. troops with more than 300 million "Minutes That Matter" and distributed more than 5 million prepaid international calling cards and have recycled more than 15 million mobile devices, reducing the impact on landfills. Approximately half of the phones processed are reconditioned and reused, while the those that can't be are dismantled for to reclaim materials and the funds raised from this process are used to purchase calling cards.

"For more than a century, AT&T has been dedicated to supporting our veterans, active military personnel and their families through various company initiatives," AT&T New York President Amy Kramer said. "We are honored to collaborate with Deputy Minority Leader Griffo, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center and Cell Phones For Soldiers again this year to encourage the Mohawk Valley and North Country community to join us and donate their used mobile devices and tablets to help the brave men and women who are deployed to protect and serve our country stay connected to their friends, family and loved ones at home, especially during the holiday season."

"I would like to thank Deputy Minority Leader Griffo and AT&T for once again spearheading this important and worthy initiative, Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director, said. "This annual collection drive has helped many men and women serving in our military connect with their families and loved ones during the holidays and throughout the year. It is my hope that the community again steps up to help

our troops.”

“Each year we have been humbled by the amount of people and organizations like AT&T and community leaders like Deputy Minority Leader Griffio that take the initiative to support our military members and veterans,” said Cell Phones For Soldiers co-founder Robbie Bergquist. “The communication gap between military members actively serving and their families is a crucial need that Cell Phones For Soldiers is committed to addressing for years to come. As a charity, we rely on partnerships like these to continue our mission to connect our military members with their families while serving abroad.”

For more information on Cell Phones For Soldiers, please visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com).

\*\*\*To prepare your mobile phone for donation here are some tips on how to erase all personal information that may be stored on it to protect your privacy:

- Remove your phone's SIM card Erase your address book, photos, messages and other stored information.
- Restore the device factory settings on your device.
- For instructions on how to do this, go to owner's manual or to the manufacturers' web site.

For more than a century, AT&T has been proudly supporting veterans, active military personnel and their families through numerous company initiatives. The company seeks to support military members and veterans at home as well as abroad. Multiple company initiatives focus on helping military members transition to the civilian workforce. AT&T is committed to hiring 20,000 veterans by the end of 2020, with more than 1,600 already hired across the country since 2013.

Over the past 5 years, AT&T and the AT&T Foundation contributed or directed more than \$21 million to organizations and projects that support military, veterans and their families through corporate, social investment and AT&T Foundation giving programs. As part of the company's Thank Our Heroes campaign, AT&T has teamed up with 16 organizations across the U.S. to recognize our nation's heroes and serve active duty military personnel, veterans and their families. This was part of a \$500,000 total contribution. In addition to making a monetary contribution, last year alone, AT&T has contributed over 40,000 volunteer hours to hundreds of veteran-focused events and programs. Since 2007, AT&T and its customers have donated more than \$64.5 million and distributed more than 600,000 pre-paid calling cards to servicemen and women.