

The LEADER

H'heads student launches holiday card drive for troops, vets

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A 12-year-old student at Horseheads Middle School is bringing back her holiday card drive for troops and veterans - and hopes to make it even bigger this year.

By Derrick Ekek@the-leader.com

HORSEHEADS | A 12-year-old student at Horseheads Middle School is bringing back her holiday card drive for troops and veterans - and hopes to make it even bigger this year.

Sophie Kartzman, a Horseheads seventh-grader, began making holiday "thank you" cards for troops with a friend in 2013, when she was a fifth-grader, as part of a volunteerism program at Horseheads Intermediate School.

"We were in an artsy mood that day, apparently, and we just sat down and started making cards," Kartzman said. "We set a goal of 100 cards, and we surpassed it."

Kartzman sent the cards to the American Red Cross, which distributed them to military bases and VA hospitals as part of its Holiday Cards for Heroes drive.

In 2014, Kartzman's holiday card campaign got some attention and took off. She set a goal of 1,000 cards and blew past it, collecting 13,000 cards from her school, the community and well beyond for Holiday Cards for Heroes.

She was later honored with the American Red Cross Spirit of Humanity Award, Chemung County Sunrise Rotary's Paul Harris Award, and the George Bush Points of Light Daily Award, a congressional award.

This year, the goal is 15,000 cards, Kartzman announced during Thursday's kickoff event at Horseheads Middle School.

"Really anyone can make or design a card, and it will go to a soldier or veteran," she said.

The cards will be collected through Nov. 23 at Corning Chiropractic Associates, the Big Flats Community Center, Jubilee Foods in Horseheads, Save-A-Lot in Elmira and the Elmira Star-Gazette.

Kartzman and her friends and family will have a bigger role in distributing the cards this year. The local Red Cross chapter is supporting Sophie's campaign, but there isn't a national P.O. box to send cards for Holiday Mail for Heroes this year.

Regulations prevent the boxes from merely being addressed to military bases, so local servicemen are being recruited to pass out cards to the soldiers in their units, and contacts are being made to distribute them at VA hospitals, said Sophie's mom, Denise Kartzman. The Corning UPS store will ship boxes of cards, and WENY has agreed to pay the postage, Denise Kartzman said.

Cas Krolak, a Horseheads resident and World War II veteran who was the guest of honor at Thursday's kickoff, said the cards will mean a lot to the soldiers who get them.

"I remember when I was in the service, the guys would line up for mail call around the holidays, hoping to get something," Krolak recalled. "There were always a lot of sad faces because some of them didn't get a card, they didn't get anything from home."

Krolak was presented with card made by Horseheads student Aaron Bailey that said "thank you to an awesome American soldier."

U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning, who also attended the kickoff, called Kartzman's card drive a "simple, impactful way" to support those in the Armed Forces.

Ron Holloway, Kartzman's principal at Horseheads Middle School, said it "really shows what a very small initiative can become."

The Student Council and the National Junior Honor Society at the middle school are both helping with Kartzman's card drive this year.