

37,000+ holiday cards headed around the world

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(Photo: Kelly Gampel / Staff Photo)

By the hands of hundreds - if not thousands - of Southern Tier residents, 37,712 military members and veterans will receive holiday cards this year.

The cards were collected during Dream Big Sophie's Casimir "Cas" J. Krolak Holiday Card Drive in October and November. More than 10 volunteers gathered at the Corning UPS store on Saturday to sort, pack and send off about 35,000 cards; a few thousand will go to local veterans.

The card drive began with a modest goal of 100 holiday cards in 2013 between card drive founder Sophie Kartzman, now 13, and a friend. For her fourth and final year leading the charge, Sophie was proved right when she initially set the 2016 goal at 30,000.

Troops in Newburgh Air Force Base, Iraq and the Pacific Islands will each receive 1,000 cards. Ten-thousand cards are being sent to the Arabian Sea and another 20,000 to Fort Lee in Virginia. Other destinations include Fort Drum, Jordan, Stratton Air National Guard, Afghanistan, Qatar and Kuwait.

Cards staying in the Southern Tier will be distributed to the Big Flats, Campbell, Bath, Corning and Montour Falls American legions, and Department of Veteran Affairs offices in Bath and Canandaigua.

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Thirteen-year-old Sophie Kartzman and her brother, 18-year-old Matt, pack holiday cards on Saturday inside the Corning UPS store. The cards will be sent to active military service members around the world. (Photo: Kelly Gampel / Staff Photo)

Through the dedication and passion she has invested in the card drive, the Horseheads Middle School eighth grader has learned several things over the years.

"I've learned that, like, volunteering doesn't need to be difficult; it can be really easy and this can happen," Sophie said standing with 66 card-packed boxes behind her. She also learned a lot about people.

The moment Sophie realized the impact of what the card drive could do came in the first year when a veteran cried after he was handed one of the 100 holiday cards she and a friend made.

"That was the real moment for everything," she explained. "I don't know how to explain it; It's just something that's so wonderful to see someone that really, really, appreciate this and that we all know that it's really, really going toward something."

The 2016 card drive was named after Sophie's friend, the late Casimir Krolak.

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"(Casimir Krolak) was such a big part of it, he was the face of it for a while and he was the symbol of it," Sophie said.

Gallery Dream Big Sophie

Krolak died Aug. 15 at the age of 92.

The 13-year-old expressed her gratitude to every person who made a card - no matter how many.

"I would like to give a big thank you to everyone who made a card," Sophie said. "You guys all made this happen and I really appreciate it."

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Cards collected from the Casimir "Cas" J. Krolak Holiday Card Drive are unloaded from the bed of a truck Saturday and taken inside the Corning UPS store; 37,712 cards were dropped off. (Photo: Kelly Gampel / Staff Photo)

This year's card drive marked her last time spearheading the project. In the fall, Sophie will be a freshman and will focus more on academics so the initiative will be handed off to an undetermined group.

Over the past four years, more than 87,000 cards have been given to military members and veterans through the initiative.

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More than 65 boxes filled with holiday cards sit behind the Corning UPS counter Saturday waiting for labels. (Photo: Kelly Gampel / Staff Photo)