

SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS: Holiday card drive kicks off

Kelly Gampel , kgampel@stargazette.com | @theSGphotos Published 5:55 p.m. ET Oct. 19, 2016 | Updated 6:10 p.m. ET Oct. 19, 2016



(Photo: KELLY GAMPEL / Staff Photo)

Brightening the holiday season for 30,000 past and present military service members is the goal of the 2016 Casimir "Cas" J. Krolak Holiday Card Drive.

Whether handmade or premade, Dream Big Sophie's namesake, 13-year-old Sophie Kartzman, is collecting holiday cards to send to active military members and veterans just in time for the holiday season. The 2016 drive will be Sophie's last hoorah leading the project before passing the torch to a student organization.

Sophie, a Horseheads eighth-grade student, announced the lofty 2016 goal of 30,000 cards Wednesday at the annual holiday card drive's kickoff event at Horseheads Middle School.

With the help of her school district and surrounding communities, Sophie is confident the goal can be met.

This year's card drive has an extra special place in Sophie's heart, she said.

She chose to honor her friend, the late Casimir Krolak, by renaming the drive.

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

Krolak died Aug. 15 at the age of 92.

Krolak, a World War II veteran, and Sophie became fast friends following one of her presentations at Bethany Manor. He became the face of the project when card drive posters were created that pictured Sophie kissing Krolak's cheek.



In a 2014 photo, Casimir "Cas" Krolak, left, a World War II veteran, gets a kiss from Sophie Kartzman, of Horseheads. (Photo: PROVIDED PHOTO)

Over the last four years, Sophie never imagined the card drive would get so big.

The card drive began in 2013 when Sophie and a friend sat down and created 100 homemade holiday cards to show their appreciation to service members overseas, as part of the American Red Cross' Holidays for Heroes campaign. The following year, she set a goal of 1,000 cards, but quickly surpassed that to a total of about 13,000 cards. In 2015, she set a goal 15,000 and zoomed to the 26,000 mark.

When the Casimir "Cas" J. Krolak Holiday Card Drive gears up in 2017, the Horseheads Middle School National Junior Honor Society will be absorbing the responsibilities, Sophie said, while she focuses on what she expects to be a heavy workload as she will be a high school freshman.

Card creating events will be held occasionally until the pickup deadline. To find an event, visit [DreamBigSophie.org \(http://dreambigophie.org/wp-content/uploads/Dream-Big-Sophie-Event-Schedule-2016.pdf\)](http://dreambigophie.org/wp-content/uploads/Dream-Big-Sophie-Event-Schedule-2016.pdf).

The 2016 card collection already has a head start with 7,249 cards that spilled over last year.

All cards will be collected periodically until Nov. 30 at the following locations:

- Corning Chiropractic Associates, 75 W. Pulteney St., Corning
- Star Gazette, 310 E. Church St. Elmira
- Big Flats Community Center, 476 Maple St., Big Flats
- Horseheads Central School District, 1 Raider Ln., Horseheads (South Wing of the high school)
- Jubilee Foods, 2898 Westinghouse Rd. #504, Horseheads
- Save A Lot, 308 William St., Elmira
- Save A Lot, 420 Bolivar Rd., Wellsville
- The Corning UPS Store, 85 Denison Pkwy. E., Corning
- Bethany Nursing Home Courtyard, 3005 Watkins Rd., Horseheads

Organizers advise no glitter be used in the card making process.

Follow [@theSGphotos](https://twitter.com/thesgphotos) on Twitter or on Instagram [@kelly.gampel](https://www.instagram.com/kelly.gampel/)

Read or Share this story: <http://stargaz.tt/2eSMTR9>