



Ways to Give at Thanksgiving



By Genevieve Northup

Thanksgiving is a time to remember what we are thankful for — family, friends, a home, a steady job, our health, our freedom. It is also a chance to give back to those who selflessly serve the United States and their families. Many organizations are doing just that, and they need your help!

American Red Cross

The American Red Cross is known for preparing the public for emergency situations and providing disaster relief. The Red Cross supports U.S. military communities with emergency communication messages, health and safety courses, volunteers, and deployment services.

How to help: The majority of the Red Cross staff is volunteers who teach CPR and first aid

certification classes, assist with office administration and host information tables. The Red Cross also connects individuals with local facilities that need volunteers, such as installation post offices, chapels and clinics. Your on-base post office need lots of volunteers to sort mail from November to January.

Right now, you can sign and help collect greeting cards during the Holiday Mail for Heroes project. Since its inception, more than 6.5 million letters and cards have been received for distribution to downrange troops, military families, veterans and servicemembers.

Army Volunteer Corps

The Army Volunteer Corps provides volunteer support for Army Community Service (ACS), Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR), and other Army services.

How to help: Register and get started. If you're not sure what you want to do, stop by your local ACS office for assistance.

Angel Tree

Angel Trees located at Exchanges, commissaries

and chapels are not just for decoration. Though managed by different organizations in each community, every tree serves one purpose: to provide financial aid for military families.

How to help: Pick an envelope from the tree, enclose cash or gift cards and drop the sealed envelope in the designated box.

AWAG

Americans Working Around the Globe promotes volunteerism by providing training and resources, as well as networking opportunities that bring volunteers together.

How to help: To join AWAG, log onto www.awagleadership.org and find your area's page. Or help fund future leadership seminars.

DECA

The Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) oversees more than 280 commissaries worldwide, including 14 in Germany.

How to help: Since June 2011, DECA has sold more than 675,000 gift cards, with a redemption



rate of 90 percent. Consider giving gift cards to charitable organizations for distribution to families in need.

Fisher Houses

Located at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC), two Fisher Houses provide comfortable free lodging for family members and patients being treated at the hospital. Since opening at LRMC in 2001, more than 17,000 families have called these houses “home.”

How to help: Over the past 15 years, nearly 27,000 volunteers have prepared meals and baked goods for guests, landscaped the property, cleaned the houses, driven family members for groceries, hosted food drives and contributed in other ways. The houses also accept monetary and in-kind donations. Email volunteerlfh@gmail.com to get started.

Project Rudolph/Operation Angel

These programs ensure servicemembers arriving at the Ramstein Passenger Terminal and being treated at LRMC receive tokens of love.

How to help: Monetary donations and care package essentials are needed each year.

Soldiers' Angels

With the mission, “May No Soldier Go Unloved,” Soldiers' Angels initiatives assist veterans, deployed and wounded servicemembers, and families. Efforts at LRMC include providing blankets, hygiene products and other comfort items for wounded heroes.

How to help: Needs vary by month. For a current list of items, visit soldiersangelsgermany.blogspot.de.

Spouses' Clubs

Spouses' clubs raise money to support their military communities.

How to help: Needs vary by location, so reach out to local clubs directly. Here are a couple to contact in the Kaiserslautern Military Community:

The Ramstein Officers' Spouses Club (ROSC) co-sponsors a Holiday Cookie Drive and needs baked goods to give to airmen living in installation dorms. ROSC also requires thousands of volunteers to successfully plan and execute the annual Ramstein Bazaar (held in September), which benefits the Air Force Aid Society, scholarship funds and youth groups, to name a few.

The Kaiserslautern Landstuhl Spouses Association (KLSA) runs several thrift stores in the area to offer affordable, gently used clothing and household items to military families. Volunteers are needed to keep stores running smoothly. If you'd like to donate, remember that holiday decorations are in high demand.

Snowball Express

Snowball Express hosts gatherings for children of the fallen to enjoy educational and social experiences. The namesake annual event supports surviving family members during the holidays. USMC SSGT Donald C. May was killed in Iraq in March 2003. His wife, Deborah May, and three children are among those who have benefited from Snowball Express. May says she and her kids “love being with all the other families and

knowing we don't have to explain our loss. It's during the month of December, which is a hard month for us, anyway, so all the love we get from Snowball Express makes getting through Christmas easier.”

How to help: Currently, events are held only in the United States. You can make a donation online for the next Snowball Express.

USO

The USO maintains information and resource centers and organizes trips, entertainment, meals and other morale-boosting activities.

How to help: USO Wiesbaden hosts a Winter Fest with a mini Christmas market and gives away Christmas trees to families. The Single Soldiers Dinner is sponsored by volunteers and includes presents, prizes and a home-cooked dinner. Visit your region's website to find out about current volunteer openings and holiday events near you.

Other Clubs and Organizations

You can find a number of clubs and organizations in your area — family readiness groups, key spouses clubs, university alumni associations, first sergeants associations, booster clubs, university or fraternity/sorority alumni chapters, Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) — that engage in volunteer work and gather donations for various causes.

How to help: Contact them to find out how you can support their efforts. You may be able to “adopt” a single servicemember, create care packages to be sent downrange, or raise money for charities. ■