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USO Northwest receives half million dollars' worth of Girl Scout Cookies

SEATTLE, WA (April 2, 2014) – The USO Northwest Shali Center on Joint Base Lewis-McChord was humming with activity on Tuesday. While volunteers served those participating in a large military exercise, a half million dollars' worth of cookies from the Girl Scouts of Western Washington needed to be unloaded. The event is large enough to be fondly known as Operation Cookie Drop.

"We are so fortunate to have this fabulous partnership with the Girl Scouts of Western Washington," said USONW Shali Center Manager Andrew Oczkewicz. "The services members and families really enjoy this annual tradition, as evident by all those who showed up."

This year's donation from the Girl Scouts of Western Washington was 129,218 boxes of cookie, valued at \$574,472.

Representatives from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, both military and spouses, arrived at the USONW Shali Center early in the morning to load their cars with cases of cookies for their units. Over 2,600 cases were packed into waiting cars. Distributing cookies to the units the day of delivery helped reduce the amount of storage space usually taken.

"I think this year's delivery went well despite the challenges we had," said USONW Volunteer Herb Schmeling. "We were confined in maneuver space but we made the best of it."

The base exercise going on required the driveway the USONW usually uses during Operation Cookie Drop. USONW volunteers and military volunteers organized by Senior Master Sergeant Angela Fernandez of the 62nd Aerial Port Squadron were required to unload faster than usual. They often needed to switch sides of the building to load as the driveway was claimed by the military exercise.

"Our first delivery in 2008 was about 14,000 boxes and they fit nicely into the cookie room," said Herb. "They got larger each year."

He has volunteered at each Operation Cookie Drop since 2008. A highlight for the USONW was when representatives from the Washington Army National Guard J9 unit arrived.

"I had been thinking all morning about how nice it would be if some of the cookies could go to the National Guard troops helping out at the Oso Landslide," said Herb. "So I was truly delighted when representatives of the WANG J9 arrived to pick up cookies for the Oso troops."

Savannah, of Troop 43534, was on site to help the USONW distribute cookies and stack them in the storage space.

"Through Operation Cookie Drop, our girls learn the importance of giving back to their community and, in a small way, thank our military personnel," said Director of Retail Operations Christine Afflen with the Girl Scouts of Western Washington.

USONW Volunteer Marina Baker said she was impressed with how well Savannah kept up with the troops and didn't complain while moving the thousands of boxes.

"She was even bummed when her mom said it was time for a quick lunch break. Her reply was "Seriously Mom? Now?". She was currently in the assembly line taking boxes from soldiers," said Marina.

The Girl Scout cookies will be distributed throughout the Northwest region. The USONW Mobile Canteen will have them available at events throughout the year and boxes will be sent to the center in Portland, Oregon, opening in July.

“My 7 year-old granddaughter is in her second year of Girl Scouts and I tell her often, how important Operation Cookie Drop is to the troops,” said Herb. “A box of cookies no matter if it is consumed here in the states or in the hills and plains of Afghanistan is a personal piece of home. For at least a moment, that little box takes one’s mind off what they are doing and reminds them of home!”

The USO Northwest is grateful for all who buy boxes of cookies for Operation Cookie Drop, said USONW Executive Director Don Leingang.

The Girl Scouts of Western Washington will also be purchasing another 14,400 boxes of Thin Mints to be delivered directly to the USO Northwest, said Christine.

About USO Northwest

USO Northwest serves more than 500,000 active-duty military and their families annually throughout Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington State, and is an important part of the USO (United Service Organizations), a historic non-profit organization lifting the spirits of America’s troops and their families millions of times each year at hundreds of places worldwide.

USO Northwest provides a touch of home through its centers at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, its USONW Mobile Canteen RV, and innovative programs and services. It also provides critical support to those who need it most, including military deploying overseas and arriving home, military families, wounded warriors and their families, and the families of the fallen.

USO Northwest is not a government agency, but a private, nonprofit organization relying on the generosity of volunteers and donors. USO Northwest also is supported through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC-15348). To join us in this patriotic mission, and to learn more about USO Northwest, please visit usonw.org.

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