

DESERT STORM VETERAN NOW HELPING SEND SUPPLIES TO TROOPS

Vince Randazzo of Valley Baptist Medical Center helping with “Adopt-A-Platoon” Project

HARLINGEN – Vince Randazzo, Director of Human Resources Information Systems at Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen, knows first-hand what’s it’s like for our troops serving in the Middle East – and how they look forward to receiving care packages and mail from back home.

Before coming to Valley Baptist, Mr. Randazzo served in the U.S. Air Force during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He says he was surprised to receive care packages sent by “kind-hearted strangers” in the United States.

“It was the coolest thing that the people back home were thinking about us,” Mr. Randazzo recalls. “In the desert, having those extras definitely meant something to us. We wrote back to say we appreciated their thoughts and their blessings.”

Mr. Randazzo hasn’t forgotten what those acts of kindness meant to him – and though he is no longer in the military himself, he is now helping to spearhead an effort to send care packages of much-needed supplies to U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Iraq and on ships in hostile and remote areas of the world.

Under the “Adopt-a-Platoon Fourth of July Salute to Our Nation’s Heroes Campaign” at Valley Baptist, Mr. Randazzo hopes to raise \$10,000 – in order to send 358 care packages to six platoons in the Middle East.

“Our service members overseas are still living in war-time conditions -- including many who are living in tents in the desert,” Mr. Randazzo says. “We are trying to do our part to make this Fourth of July a reminder to them that they are not forgotten.”

Between now and July 4th, Mr. Randazzo and other employees at Valley Baptist are collecting donations for the overseas care packages. Donations are accepted at the Valley Baptist gift shops, on the first floor of the hospitals in Harlingen and Brownsville, as well as at First Community Bank locations at Valley Baptist-Harlingen and Valley Baptist-Brownsville.

The care packages -- which cost an average of \$28 each to fill and ship to the Middle East -- include tooth brushes, hand sanitizer, and other toiletries, as well as

granola bars, cookies, beef jerky and other food items. Also included are socks, playing cards, and various seasonal items.

Mr. Randazzo said he was challenged to find a way to get Valley Baptist involved in supporting our troops by Valley Baptist CEO James Eastham during a meeting for Valley Baptist employees. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Randazzo found out about the non-profit Adopt-a-Platoon program – based right here in the Valley. Adopt-a-Platoon sends over 200,000 care packages to our troops every year.

The founder of Adopt-a-Platoon, Ida Hägg of Rio Hondo, started the program when her son was stationed in Bosnia almost 20 years ago. Ida's son asked his mother for assistance to get mail and packages to the troops in his unit -- many of whom received nothing from home.

Mr. Randazzo also helps coordinate a second veteran-oriented program at Valley Baptist, along with Joe Diaz, RN, who works in Valley Baptist's Ambulatory Infusion Unit. Diaz, an Army veteran, is a member of the Patriot Guard Riders, which honors returning active-duty troops -- as well as deceased veterans -- by providing motorcycle escorts and honor guards. Mr. Randazzo acts as a liaison for funeral services for troops killed in action, finding out which Patriot Guard volunteers at Valley Baptist will be able to attend to provide motorcycle escorts for the funeral processions.

Mr. Randazzo and his wife Gail are both originally from the Chicago area. His wife is a fourth grade teacher at Stuart Place Elementary School in Harlingen, where his youngest son, Jonathon, is a student. Their older son, Anthony, attends Vela Middle School.

Mr. Randazzo enjoys spending time with family and friends, wood working, and fishing in the Lower Laguna Madre.

Those who would like more information on the Adopt-a-Platoon program may visit <http://adoptaplatoon.org/>, or contact Mr. Randazzo at (956) 389-1103, or by e-mail at vince.randazzo@valleybaptist.net.

PHOTO



Vince Randazzo, Director of Human Resources Information Services at Valley Baptist Medical Center-Harlingen, is coordinating an “Adopt-A-Platoon” campaign at Valley Baptist, to send care packages to U.S. troops serving in the Middle East.