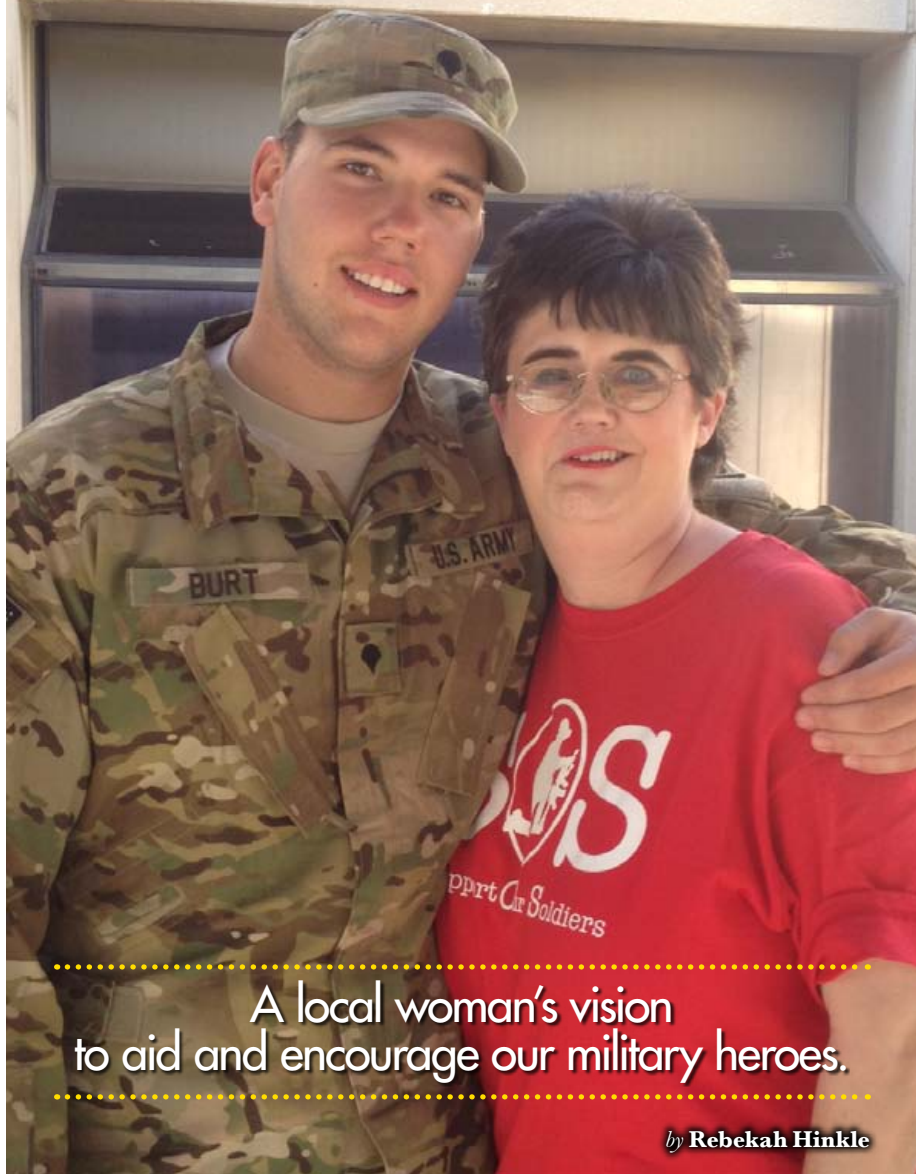


SUPPORT OUR SOLDIERS



A local woman's vision
to aid and encourage our military heroes.

by **Rebekah Hinkle**

About a year ago Teresa Nelson, of Teresa's Treasures, took an order for a custom gift basket that would change her life—and consequently the lives of countless others.

THE BEGINNING

When a customer came in to her gift shop and asked Teresa to design a custom gift basket last June for a U.S. soldier stationed overseas, Teresa was happy to oblige. Upon hearing back from her customer how much this soldier appreciated the care package, Teresa realized God was answering a prayer of her own.

She had asked God to give her a personal purpose, and she began to see the potential for ministry to our US soldiers stationed overseas. Teresa and her husband adopted a soldier to care for, and by the fall of 2011 they had adopted 11 more! Friends soon began asking how they could help and suggested Teresa develop an organization dedicated to this purpose, and thus Support Our Soldiers (SOS) was born.

The impact of the organization has grown steadily over the past year through the increasing interest of local businesses and citizens who care deeply about showing appreciation and support for US soldiers. Thanks to the donations of time and resources, SOS currently cares for approximately 125 soldiers, most of whom are stationed in Afghanistan.

KEEPING IT PERSONAL

What makes SOS unique is its dedication to keeping their contact with each soldier personal. Rather than making 125 generic care packages, the organization gets to know each individual soldier and personalizes each package. Teresa says they want their soldiers to know that they are deeply appreciated and cared for on a personal level.

Teresa knows that their work has had tangible positive results. This past Christmas the group sent stockings full of supplies and letters to their soldiers. After receiving his stocking, one private met with his sergeant to express how important the letters had been to him. He admitted that he had intended to take his own life the following day but had been so encouraged by the letters of support that he wanted to ask for help instead. SOS knows of 4 other similar stories of lives literally saved by the work they've done.

The work of the organization goes beyond care packages and letters though. They recently paid for the return flight of a soldier who wouldn't have otherwise been here to see the birth of his child.

They also had the privilege of helping collect donations from local hotels and business to arrange a honeymoon for a recently married military couple who didn't have the means to do so themselves. When the soldier asked, "Why did you do this for us? I know it wasn't easy to plan all this," Teresa was able to reply, "Because of what you do for me that's not easy for you to do either."

Support Our Soldiers knows their personalized contact is appreciated. Soldiers they first "met" while deployed have since returned stateside but have maintained contact via the group's Facebook page. One such soldier, upon receiving orders to redeploy, asked Teresa, "You're going back with me, right?"

EVENTS AND ACCOLADES

SOS has hosted several successful events this year, one of which was a local coin drive that raised over \$6000. The proceeds are being used to help cover the organization's shipping costs of up to \$900 each month.



The group also organized Fill the Hill on Memorial Day, in which 150 supporters gathered at the “Welcome to Burleson” sign on I-35 as a visible show of support to all military personnel passing through that day. The activities included a prayer circle and the playing of Taps, a song played to honor the contributions and sacrifices of our soldiers.

Recently, Support Our Soldiers has received increased recognition both locally and across the State of Texas. Mayor Ken Shetter issued a proclamation making May 21-28 SOS Week in Burleson each year, and State Senator Wendy Davis issued a proclamation commending Teresa Nelson for her work with the organization. It is the hope of the group that such recognition will serve to increase the public’s awareness of the continued need for showing appreciation to our soldiers.

YOU CAN HELP

As the reach of SOS continues to grow, they welcome increased participation by community members.

You can make a donation of letters or care package items. Teresa’s Treasures, First National Bank of Burleson, the Burleson Chamber of Commerce, and Serendipity Salon serve as continual drop-off locations for the organization. Soldiers truly appreciate prac-

tical items such as gum, drink mix packets, books, toothpaste, and deodorant. They also enjoy receiving personal letters of support and encouragement.

You can Wear Red on Fridays! Wearing red on Fridays is a national campaign to show support for our troops. Several local businesses participate each week as a visible way of thanking those who give so much on our behalf. Red SOS shirts can be purchased at JamzSports in Old Town Burleson.

You can connect directly with SOS through their Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/supportoursoldier>) or via email at soldierinfo@gmail.com to learn about upcoming events or service opportunities.

A year ago Teresa Nelson had no idea a simple business transaction would transform her personal mission, and today the effects continue to bless US soldiers stationed all over the world.

SOS is a community based project that aids and encourages our military heroes through letters of support and much-needed supplies. We show our soldiers that they are not forgotten.