

## Letters to Soldiers campaign triples down on Christmas goal



**By Brock Weir**

Last year, she set a target of 2,000 and hit 6,500. Now, Dianne Harrison has upped the ante.

The Aurora woman who, for the last several years, has been spearheading a wide-ranging campaign encouraging people to take a moment out of their day to send a Christmas card to a Canadian servicemember overseas, has set a goal of 3,000 cards this year. That's the goal; the hope, however, is crossing the 9,000 mark and they need your help.

Brightly wrapped boxes are positioned in a number of locations throughout the community including Town Hall, the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, Aurora Family Leisure Complex, and Northridge Community Church, among others, just waiting to accept your cards and some of them are already groaning under the weight of community efforts. By Friday, they were just 900 cards shy of their first 3,000 hurdle.

"Last year was such a success," says Ms. Harrison. "So many people, from Nova Scotia to Calgary, took part and having tripled our goal, one of our grandchildren said, "I think you should triple your goal this year."

Ms. Harrison firmly believes it is our duty as Canadians "to remember those who are fighting for our country and our freedom" and this year's significant anniversaries make this reflection all the more poignant.

"People are remembering we're lucky to have our freedom with everything that is happening around the world," she says. "Our guys and girls are out there fighting for these countries and keeping us safe. I think it is about time we take the blinders off and realise that we're a pretty special people, a wonderful country, and it is because of our military and we have to remember them."

Since launching the 2017 Christmas Card Drive at the start of the month, Ms. Harrison has been hard at work visiting a number of local schools "ranging from Aurora High School, to King City Secondary School, to Sir William Mulock Secondary School in Newmarket, to feeder schools in between" to spread this message.

So far, some schools and nursing homes have produced over 200 cards a piece and they just continue to roll in.

"When we get the cards, they are all so exciting," she says. "When people see boxes in public buildings, they read the instructions and take the project on knowing that they can make a difference. If everyone took on just one card, it would be big. Maybe the person who receives your card might be the only card they receive for Christmas.

"The soldiers love knowing that we care about them. So many times people hear back. Even if the card is from a little kid with just scribbles, it is still something. Some people say you shouldn't do that, but how do you know that the soldier on the other end doesn't have a toddler back at home, and all of a sudden, when they open it up, it just touches their heart because it might be just what their own child is doing at home?"

Cards must be placed in one of the receiving boxes, or picked up by Ms. Harrison by December 4, a week later than last year's deadline. Last year, the Christmas Card program relied on Canada Post and, at the eleventh hour they refused to take the letters until a last minute intervention by the local MP's office. This year, the letters will be in safe hands "picked up in person by a soldier from CFB Borden who will take them directly to Belleville for distribution.

"As soon as we're done we'll start working on our list for next year and asking people what we should do for 2018," says Ms.

Harrison. ?Next year I would like to start at the beginning of October. I try to start it close to Remembrance Day but I think you have to hit it at the beginning of October planting the seed to let them know what we're doing.?

For more information on the program, or to arrange a collection box for your own organization, club or business, contact Dianne Harrison at [bdharrison2012@gmail.com](mailto:bdharrison2012@gmail.com).