

Queens Guard Alumni Partner with University to Support Our Troops

by Cara Bufanio MGSA '85

Over the course of our overseas conflicts during the 20th century, the United States ensured that our troops enjoyed familiar entertainment and the creature comforts of home regardless of their station across the globe, from U.S.O. tours offering Hollywood stars and Bob Hope's comedy to grass roots efforts among Americans donating homemade cakes, baseball gloves and Elvis Presley records.

In the spirit of this tradition and the RUA's Day of Service last fall, the Queens Guard Alumni Association (QGAA) partnered with the Rutgers Office of Student Veterans Services and RU4 Troops, an undergraduate student organization, to collect suitable items from alumni for delivery to our troops in Afghanistan during the holiday season.

The QGAA supports and promotes the interests of U.S. military veterans and considers their support of the care package initiative as an extension of this commitment. "Many of our QGAA alumni are military veterans and truly appreciated comforting efforts from home during overseas combat tours, particularly during the holiday season", says **Joseph Carlani RC '84**, QGAA President. "We view our participation as an opportunity to engage both QGAA and University alumni to support this important and ongoing campus initiative."

In 2008, **Marybeth Schmutz UCNB '86, SMLR '07** of University Relations coordinated shipping care packages overseas. As student efforts to collect suitable items evolved, RU4 Troops was formed. Since 2009, under the leadership of **Adam Elias RC '10**, then **Benjamin Falkowski SAS '11**, and current President **Olivia Paladino SC&I '13**, the program has blossomed. In September 2011, **Stephen Abel**, Director of RU's Office of Student Veterans Services, became faculty

advisor for the group and now oversees the program. He has broadened the outlets for distribution beyond commercial carriers to include military flights from Joint Base MDL in southern New Jersey.

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—RU4 TROOPS PRESIDENT
OLIVIA PALADINO

efforts of Marybeth, Adam, Ben, Olivia, Joseph, as well as my Assistant Director, **Robert Bright**, to invest time and energy in support of this initiative" Abel shared. "As our troops are now withdrawn from Iraq, and will soon likewise from Afghanistan, we plan for our care packages to reach other active combat areas, such as Uganda and Djibouti (Horn of Africa), as well as remote non-combat stations, such as Honduras and the Korean DMZ."

While studying for a bachelor's degree in journalism, Paladino serves energetically as president of RU4 Troops and coordinates the efforts of its members to collect and pack items. Paladino emphasizes, "We want to give the troops a sense of belonging by making the boxes very Rutgers centric while also making them smile and feel special." Typically, 15 to 25 students convene at Abel's office on Lafayette Street to help box items and distribute any Rutgers logo items— such as Rutgers blankets, flags, t-shirts, and issues of alumni magazines and The Daily Targum.

An Army captain aviator wrote a note of thanks for his package, particularly for inclusion of a "Block R" Rutgers blanket to keep him warm during cold nights in Afghanistan. "Don't underestimate a minute that you spend making these packages", said Sergio Duarte, a returning veteran. "When I was in Afghanistan, I was cold and lonely, I just wanted to feel something, I hung my Rutgers flag outside my tent, it gave me comfort, it gave me strength."

dreds of items", notes Carlani. "She personally delivered the donated items to Steve's office and appreciates their importance as several members of her family serve in the military."

QGAA looks forward to annually hosting the holiday care package drive on behalf of the Rutgers alumni community, and encourages donations to the Student Veterans Service Office all year long. Donors are welcome to request that items be delivered to specific family members and friends



QGAA PRESIDENT JOSEPH CARLANI, RC '84; RU4 TROOPS PRESIDENT OLIVIA PALADINO, SC&I '13; STUDENT VETERANS SERVICES DIRECTOR STEPHEN ABEL AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ROBERT BRIGHT APPEAR IN FRONT OF ARCHIVAL PHOTOS FROM THE QUEENS GUARD COLLECTION ON DISPLAY AT THE RUTGERS CLUB. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RUTGERS OFFICE OF STUDENT VETERANS SERVICES.

QGAA promoted alumni involvement and even attracted Affinity Federal Credit Union to join in the effort. Ann Gardner, an Affinity Market Manager, learned of the drive from a Rutgers alumnus employee who shared an email announcing various projects underway for the RUA's Day of Service. Gardner promptly collaborated with Carlani to distribute notice of the drive throughout its network of 20 branches in northern New Jersey and to over 135,000 of its clients. "Ann marshaled Affinity's resources to contribute meaningfully to our drive, resulting in the donation of many hun-

located in conflict zones. Contact the SVSO office for details at <http://veterans.rutgers.edu/>.

So, from the fabled celebrities of yesteryear to the digital grass roots efforts of the new media era, Rutgers students, staff and alumni enthusiastically collaborate and continue in the time honored American tradition of community service and support for our service men and women around the globe. ✨

The Queens Guard Alumni Association is an RAA special interest constituent group. To learn more, visit www.queensguard-rutgers.org