



Build-A-Bear Workshop® Recognizes Niceville, FL Youth as Huggable Hero

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Operation Iraqi Friendship honored for their efforts on behalf of Iraqi children

ST. LOUIS, MO, (October 2004)- Last October, two girls from Niceville, Florida were watching a news story regarding the condition of schools in war-torn Iraq. The images of children in dire situations motivated Erica Daniels, 15, and Korynne Williams, 14, to find a way to help. They enlisted the assistance of other youth in their area along with local Marines and formed Operation Iraqi Friendship. For their creative efforts, Build-A-Bear Workshop is honoring this group of caring youngsters as Huggable Heroes.

After learning about Iraqi children sitting in classrooms with no lights or windows and sharing simple items like pencils because there were not enough to go around, Erica was compelled to help. "So often we forget how lucky we are (to live in the United States) and we take so much for granted," she said. "The children there are no different really from the ones here...they laugh, play, dream and hope, but they live a life much harder than most of us could ever imagine living."

Erica and Korynne emailed Major Keith Peloquin at Balad Air Base with an idea about how they could help the children in Iraq by collecting and sending them school supplies. Major Peloquin took the idea to his General, who thought the idea was "awesome." At the time, the U.S. military had begun sending soldiers to schools in Iraq to repair and renovate them and if money was available when the repairs were done, they would purchase school supplies for the children. With groups like Operation Iraqi Friendship providing the school supplies, more money could be retained for school repairs.

The members of Operation Iraqi Friendship are involved in every aspect of the project. They gather donations, hold fundraisers and purchase and sort supplies. The group even makes their own tote bags for carrying and shipping the supplies. The kids are very appreciative of their community's support. "We could have never done this without the help of the community we live in," said Erica. "We really have an amazing town. People have called and emailed us asking about ways to help. It's exciting to see how "nice" the town of Niceville really is."

Major Peloquin nominated the members of Operation Iraqi Friendship for the Huggable Hero honor and has seen first-hand how the efforts of these youth affect the lives of children across the world as he and other Army personnel passed out the supplies to the Iraqi children. "I can't even begin to describe the impact these kids made and how honored I feel to have been a part of it," said Peloquin. "I wish somehow I could express the excitement, joy and surprise on the faces of the Iraqi kids when you put something in their hands and they know it's theirs!"

Build-A-Bear Workshop® started the Huggable Heroessm program to recognize and honor young heroes across the country that have made a difference in their own neighborhoods, schools and communities by giving of themselves to others.

Operation Iraqi Friendship is one of five outstanding groups of kids in addition to 10 exceptional children chosen as Huggable Heroes. This program is in its first year and is extremely important to Build-A-Bear Workshop. "We have always believed that it takes a village to raise a bear and these young people are shining examples of what hard work and commitment can accomplish. We are extremely proud of them, the leadership they have demonstrated and the ways in which they have improved the lives of those in their community," said Maxine Clark, Founder and Chief Executive Bear of Build-A-Bear Workshop. "Each child and group presents an inspirational story, and along with those who nominated them, we are honored to be able to recognize their efforts and dedication to the causes and programs they have supported. They are all truly amazing."

Operation Iraqi Friendship will be showcased nationally in the 2005 Build-A-Bear Workshop Huggable Heroes calendar, which will be available free in Build-A-Bear Workshop stores in late December. Operation Iraqi Friendship also won top group honors and will receive additional awards for that honor. Build-A-Bear Workshop will make a donation to Operation Iraqi Friendship and their achievements will be celebrated in their hometown.

About Build-A-Bear Workshop

Build-A-Bear Workshop is an interactive, entertainment mall-based retailer that invites Guests of all ages to create their own customized stuffed animals through an exciting bear-making process. The first store opened in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1997, and the company now operates over 160 locations in the USA with four stores in Canada. Build-A-Bear Workshop opened its first international store in Sheffield, England in the fall of 2003, recently opened stores in Japan, Korea and Denmark and plans to open its first store in Australia later this year, making it the global leader in the teddy bear business. Based on a survey compiled by Shopping Centers Today, a publication of the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), Build-A-Bear Workshop® was one of six retailers chosen and presented with the ICSC "2004 Hot Retailer Award". For more information on the company and its products call (877) 789-BEAR (2327) or visit the company's award-winning web site at www.buildabear.com.