

Fall 2004, Student Crew National Contest Winners

Winner Story #5: East Valley Middle School, East Helena, Montana
Entry submitted by Judy Salisbury

East Valley Crew members sparked the idea of honoring local military and their families whose children attended the school. Crew recruits convened and OPERATION: TROOP TALES was put into play. This special program provided parents serving overseas with books to read. Cash donations were accepted to purchase books to mail soldiers. Soldiers were encouraged to read and record books sent. In addition, bookmarks were made from pictures drawn and signed by East Valley students. In their art, students depicted soldiers reading with or to their kids. These exclusive bookmarks were given to soldiers and customers who donated at least \$5 to the book fund.

Along with camouflage tables covers, students decorated the Fair with American flags, GI Joe dolls, yellow ribbons and red, white and blue fabric creating a very patriotic and visually rich atmosphere.

A highlight of the week was a Veteran's Celebration organized by the school and the Scholastic Squad, aka the Crew. Local Veterans of Foreign Wars and active soldiers were invited to visit 6th Grade library classes. They shared firsthand experiences in recent wars and brought in photos, books, memorabilia and medals. These and other items were used to create a Military Museum exhibit. Soldiers and staff members were treated to a special luncheon hosted by the PTA, the school and members of the Scholastic Squad. These activities helped to build special bridges throughout the community between members of the military, PTA, school faculty and students.

During parent/teacher conferences, members of the Scholastic Squad dressed in camouflage fatigues and equipment. This "Camo Crew" strategically positioned themselves near school entrances to target parent visitors. Parents were greeted with salutes and invited to visit the fair after conferences. If a snappy salute wasn't enough to motivate a march to the Exchange, Camo Crew Cookie Coupons were handed out as incentives...a devious, but effective tactic.

Other promotional tactics included:

- Patriotic and camo apparel worn by the Squad during the entire week
- A "Terrific Troops Bulletin Board" was created to promote the fair and display photos of parents in the service
- The school's tiger mascot was dressed in camo attire and was used to attract attention to the Fair
- A goal board for OPERATION: TROOP TALES was displayed to advertise the effort and track progress
- A drawing for prizes helped to attract more attention and participation in the Fair. Prizes included an American flag, magnetic yellow ribbons and a camo fleece blanket.

The East Valley Scholastic squad accomplished their missions with zero casualties. The results? Nearly 96% of the parents and 100% of the staff attended the Exchange! Additionally, never before was there an attendance of soldiers, both past and present. Book Fair revenues increased by over 125%, but according to General Judy, the value of the student's involvement in the Fair cannot be measured in dollars...the true success of the experience came in the bridges built with the community...especially with those who have served or are currently serving their country.