Photo by Jim Boylan

Volunteers from the local community and Naval Station Great Lakes surround 200 Hero Packs that they filled as part of the Hero Pack Drive hosted last Saturday at St. James School in Highwood. The packs will be presented to children of deployed parents during special ceremonies beginning in April, the Month of the Military Child.

NSGL and local communities come together for worthy cause

By JIM BOYLAN
Associate Bulletin Editor

There will be a lot of smiling kids of deployed service members thanks to volunteers from Naval Station Great Lakes (NSGL), and the surrounding communities who assembled Hero Packs last Saturday at the St. James Elementary School, Highwood, Ill.

Two hundred assembled packs will be presented to children during a special ceremony in April, the Month of the Military Child, noted Kelcey Liverpool, co-founder, and CEO of Kids Rank. "This is just great and I appreciate the community support for the kids and it enhances what we are doing," she said.

The purpose of the drive, started by Operation: Military Kids, is to provide backpacks to children of deployed parents to give them the feeling of connection with their mothers and fathers who are serving in the military. The packs are filled with blank photo albums, notepads, small art kits, craft activities, stationery stamps, books, games, and mini scrapbook kits.

When geographically dispersed military parents living in civilian communities are mobilized, their children have unique needs for special support and services. They are military kids but they still look the same to teachers, friends, and the rest of the community. Their lives are turned upside down. Many of their usual support systems may no longer be adequate. Extensive media coverage of on-going military operations can create daily anxiety. These military kids need to connect with other youth in similar situations. They seek friends and adults who can empathize and can help them cope with their new world.

Operation: Military Kids creates state and local community support networks for military youth when military parents are deployed. It delivers a wide range of recreational, social and educational programs for military youth living in civilian communities. The program acknowledges the strengths and sacrifices of military kids as everyday home front heroes through Hero Packs and special recognition events. It also educates the public on the impact of the deployment cycle for service members, families, kids and the community as a whole.

"In times like these Guard/Reserve children of deployed parents seem isolated," said Linda Kupferschmid, program director, Operation: Military Kids.

"This is a great way for us to say thank you as an individual and a community. This program benefits the service members and their families when we show support at home."

"I am very proud of our Ombudsmen for stepping out of their already significant roles in supporting our military families to contribute their personal time for this worthy cause," said Capt. John Malfitano, commanding officer, NSGL, who volunteered his time in setting up and filling backpacks. Also lending a hand was QM1 William Partlow, NSGL quarterdeck leading petty officer.

Rudoff and Kelcey Liverpool, the organizers of the event would like to thank St. James Elementary in Highwood for their school support and the use of their parish hall. Linda Kupferschmid of Operation: Military Kids, Anne Kondziela, the Navy school liaison; Malifitano and the Ombudsmens, the Boy Scouts, NSGL CMDCM Leon Walker and the CPO Goat Locker; and Bobby Ferguson of the Navy League.

A special thanks for their donations goes out to Crest Craft Co., Kohl's, Operation Support Our Troops Illinois, Revelation Golf, Red Oak Elementary in Highland Park, Illinois, the Collier Family, Naval Service Training Command, and Recruit Training Command.

Any family who would like to find out how they can schedule a special ceremony to honor the children of deployed parents in their community or child's school during April, should call Kelcey Liverpool at (847) 505-2411 or e-mail her at liverpool@kidsrankonline.com.

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Volunteers and kids put together items for the Hero Packs last Saturday at St. James School in Highwood. The packs will be presented to children of deployed parents during special ceremonies beginning in April, the Month of the Military Child.