

PRESS RELEASE

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News Release: 4-1
Date: 20 April 2011
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6th Grade Berkeley Class Collects Care Packages for Troops Deployed Overseas

April 20, 2011: LAKEHURST, NJ – Last September, Berkeley Elementary School (BTES) teacher Kirk Burr talked to John Schmelzle, President of the Naval Civilian Manager's Association (NCMA) from Lakehurst about the desire for his 6th grade class to sponsor a member of the armed forces deployed overseas in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Mr. Schmelzle agreed to identify a deployed Lakehurst sailor for the class to sponsor.

When Mr. Burr and his 24 students started collecting in March, they intended to gather about 20 items to ship overseas. Soon the entire 6th grade became involved, and eventually the entire school. Within one week, three other schools, Bayville Elementary, H&M Potter and Clara B. Worth took up the cause and began collecting for the care package. Over 2,000 students collected well over 500 lbs. of skittles, gum, beef jerky, cookies, shampoo, international phone cards, Sudoku games and many other items. They even collected treats for the deployed Military Working Dogs. Additionally, the students wrote hundreds of letters to the troops thanking them for their brave service to America. At this point, Mr. Schmelzle and Michael Zitaglio, chairman of the NCMA Military Outreach Committee decided that instead of sponsoring one sailor, every sailor deployed from Lakehurst would be sponsored.

On April 15th, Mr. Burr and his students gathered up their 22 boxes of goodies, loaded them on a school bus and drove out to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst to present them to the NCMA officers. Along to help deliver the shipment were Berkeley Township Mayor, Jason Varano, the Superintendent of the Central Regional School

District, Tom Paralapanides and the President of the Board of Education, James Byrnes. The items were packed into individual care packages, each weighing well over 60 lbs.

When the packing was completed, Mr. Schmelzle talked to the students about the engineering activities performed at Lakehurst in support of the Navy. He followed this up with a tour of the engineering complex and a photo opportunity next to an F-14 Tomcat static display. The class visited the memorial plaque located at the 1937 crash site of the German airship Hindenburg. They also visited historic Hangar One and the scale model aircraft carrier deck inside the hangar used to train sailors on flight deck operations.

At the conclusion of the day, Mr. Burr and his students expressed how much they enjoyed the visit and tour, but mostly how they could play a part in helping our men and women in uniform stationed overseas. He looks forward to working with the NCMA and continuing this worthy project next year with his students.

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