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## THE BEAT: NORTH SHORE

### FROM EVANSTON TO LAKE BLUFF

# Guardsman visits to say thanks for care packages

Susan Berger

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GLENCOE -- Mark Stach has spent plenty of time in Iraq. The North Shore is a different story.

"I've never been to Glencoe--I was not even sure where it was," said Stach, who lives in Dixon, Ill.

A sergeant in the Illinois Army National Guard's Battery F, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, Stach's unit was on the receiving end of Operation Glencoe Cares while stationed overseas.

Glencoe Cares began in October when Katie Sweeney, a community service officer, visited family in Galva, Ill., home of Stach's Guard unit, and learned about some of the adversity faced by soldiers.

Stach, 32, returned home in March after a year in Iraq. While in the Middle East he read on the Internet about JJ Gavillet, 10, a Central School 5th grader who designed bracelets with the word "trooper" and sold them for \$2 to raise money to ship care packages. He tracked down JJ's phone number.

JJ missed Stach's thank-you call from Iraq, but they began an e-mail correspondence. Stach and Sweeney also stayed in contact. The three finally met May 20 when Stach came to Glencoe for the "Say No to Drugs" parade, where he was surprised to learn he was the grand marshal.

"It was all a great honor for me," he said.

The packages from Glencoe began coming at the perfect time, and soldiers got more than supplies, Stach said.

"We had been patrolling. But we changed missions and were guarding a police station in Tarmiyah," he said. "We were stuck in the middle of nowhere for five days. The packages gave us a little comfort of home."

The soldiers received magazines, food, candy and card games. But most memorable, Stach said, were letters from the children in Glencoe.

"I wish I could have responded to every single one of them," Stach said.

"She [JJ] is such a nice little girl. She is very humble. It was like she knew she needed to do this."

Stach said he never questioned support on the homefront.

"It was so nice to do this for 125 guys they didn't even know. I can tell Glencoe is a civic-minded community," Stach said. "With young people like JJ Gavillet--that's the reason why. It's important to let people in Glencoe know how

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