



CARES Story submitted by Elizabeth Bryan,
Unit Controller, Exeter Hospital

Rita Gettings,
Valet Manager

Rita, the Information Desk and the Food and Nutrition Department reached out to the community and co-workers to show compassion during difficult times. Those patients whose lives have been touched by this compassion will remember Exeter Hospital as a patriotic, caring and supportive place. Last Veterans Day, the Valet and Information Desk wanted to recognize past and current veterans. What started as a simple thank you for those passing through has expanded to ongoing support for troops and their family members.

At first, a card with an American flag was created and included the quote "It is freedom itself that still hangs in the balance, and freedom is never more than one generation from extinction."

President Ronald Reagan was presented with a Veterans Day pin and a card. Inside the card, it read:

Veteran, we honor you, your courage and your love of country ~ America the Beautiful and Land of the Free ~ Thank you for the protection and sacrifice you have given to keep us safe, to keep us free. We remain thankful for those who follow in your footsteps. The brave men and women in uniform ~ We Salute You.

Signed, From the Valet and Information Desk Staff.

On the back, the card concluded with "**Thank you from a grateful nation for your service, for your courage, for your honor.**"



People were touched and at times overwhelmed by the kindness and recognition. There were many tears and stories of bravery, injuries and pride for the U.S. The staff decided to expand the outreach with the help of the Food and Nutrition Department and put together care packages for a young woman who was stationed in Afghanistan and whose mother works at the hospital. Packages went out weekly and when the packages arrived in Afghanistan, they were well received and shared.

Then word was sent that a young soldier whose mother also worked at Exeter was wounded in an explosion. He was seriously injured and spent months in the hospital. A basket was placed at the information desk with a note requesting cards for him to encourage his recovery. He received over 200 cards and care packages from people he had never met, including a fourth grade class who drew pictures and wrote notes. He and his family were overwhelmed at the outpouring of compassion. Currently, he is back in the states still recovering while his younger brother and cousin were deployed to Afghanistan last month. This has been a grueling time and the week they were deployed, the front desk staff purchased an Angel of Courage and a patriotic balloon bouquet with the boys' names and "In friendship, support and gratitude" written on them.

Currently, we are putting together his first care package. Some of our Information Desk staff also volunteers as greeters at the Pease Tradeport in Portsmouth, NH, which is a base where flights depart to and return at all hours from the Middle East. Many of the soldiers who arrive are not stationed here and, regardless of the time of day, they receive a warm welcome, snacks and small gifts to take to their destination. Their motto is "**We stand in the place of the 'family' that couldn't be here to welcome you, hug you and thank you.**" The honor is ours.

In an effort to keep an ongoing connection to our troops, the Valet and Information Desk have requested retired American flags from the community. The stars on the flag are cut out and placed in small clear bags, and the remaining flag is ceremoniously disposed. On the back of bag there is a small poem, which reads, "I am a part of our American Flag. I have flown over a home in the U.S.A. I can no longer fly. The sun and winds have caused me to become tattered and torn. Please carry me as a reminder. You are not forgotten." Hundreds of stars have been packaged and will be handed out this year on Veterans Day. These stars are given to every soldier who goes through Pease Tradeport, and many are shipped overseas to our troops in the care packages. All these efforts have been from personal contributions. I would like to commend everyone who participated for their patriotism and compassion. I am inspired by the ongoing dedication in recognizing the troops and supporting their co-workers during these difficult times. I am proud to be their friend and co-worker.