



I was contacted recently by Operation Gratitude, a nonprofit organization based in Chatsworth, Calif., that sends care packages filled with food, entertainment, hygiene and handmade items, plus personal letters of appreciation, to veterans, first responders, new recruits, wounded heroes, their caregivers and to individually named U.S. service members deployed overseas and their families waiting at home. Operation Gratitude's mission is to lift the spirits and meet the evolving needs of the military and first responder communities, and provide volunteer opportunities for civilians anywhere in America to express their appreciation to all who serve our nation.

Operation Gratitude reached out to the Los Angeles Police Protective League as a means to distribute care packages to our deployed officers and care kits to our officers on the home front. This past holiday season, Operation Gratitude provided care packages to our officers serving in the military who were deployed away from their families. They also sent packages called "Battalion Buddies" to the young children of those officers, to provide comfort and to let them know that they, too, have caring friends across the country who are aware of their sacrifices, and send their appreciation. These packages contained treats and a teddy bear.

Operation Gratitude intends to provide First Responder Care Kits to every Los Angeles police officer, firefighter and paramedic. These Care Kits consist of approximately a dozen or more items, such as lip balm, gum, candy, energy shots, a pen, protein bars, a paracord "survival" bracelet and more—all contained in a reusable Operation Gratitude pouch. These Care Kits are a way to show gratitude and unwavering support to the men and women in uniform who defend and protect Americans here at home every day. The LAPPL will be working with the organization to facilitate the distribution of these kits.

The volunteers at Operation Gratitude are committed to delivering a Care Kit to each and every one of the approximately two million first responders throughout the United States. LAPPL is assisting them in this endeavor by putting them in contact with law enforcement unions nationwide.

Operation Gratitude was founded by Carolyn Blashek, who became a volunteer at the military lounge at Los Angeles International Airport following the attack on the United States on 9/11. She was moved by a distraught soldier who was departing for duty in a war zone, had no family or support network and was mourning the death of his infant child. This soldier needed a reason

to survive, and at that moment he did not have one. Through that contact, Blashek came up with the idea to send care packages to deployed service members similar to the ones she would send her own children when they were away from home. One of the major challenges was the change in postal requirements that packages be addressed to specific service members. She started with sending four packages on the day the Iraq War broke out in March 2003. Currently, Operation Gratitude sends more than 200,000 care packages annually. To date, they have sent more than 1.75 million care packages!

More information on this organization can be found at [www.operationgratitude.com](http://www.operationgratitude.com).

As always, you may reach me at (818) 416-6495 or at [LouTurriaga@lappl.org](mailto:LouTurriaga@lappl.org). Stay safe!