Supporting our service members is a valuable endeavor that becomes even more poignant during the holidays. Recognizing this need, OSU Extension Service in Josephine County aims to make the season a little brighter while furthering an education initiative. As 4-H youth stuff and ship joy-filled stockings to overseas troops, they strive to model the selfless service that is synonymous with membership in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Now in its 11th year, the 4-H Stockings for Soldiers project is a collaboration of Extension faculty and staff, volunteers, 4-H youth, and the community. Volunteers are a hallmark of the Extension Service and an essential component of all its programs. As instructors and mentors, Extension Service volunteers are dedicated to education and freely give their time and expertise. One such volunteer is Jonie Anderson, who has worked with the 4-H Stockings for Soldiers project since its inception to solicit donations and organize the community’s generous contributions.

Last year, the 4-H Stockings for Soldiers project received over $8,000 in monetary donations and innumerable supplies from citizens, which were used to sew and stuff the stockings and help cover the cost of shipping. Those stockings traveled to the overseas deployment of the southern Oregon National Guard and reached over 750 military members. This year, despite COVID restrictions limiting social interaction, the project will supply stockings to as many troops as possible. Under the guidance of 4-H Faculty, Susan Hunt, participants will observe all COVID safety guidelines and find creative solutions to stuff the stockings and package them for shipping.

Civic engagement is an important aspect of adolescent development and a core theme of 4-H education. The 4-H Stockings for Soldiers project is an opportunity for youth to learn the value of service while positively impacting military members’ lives. With a little luck and much effort, these stockings will reach their targets around the world before December 25, 2020.

By Cheryl Leitch for OSU Extension

OSU Extension Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs, services, activities, and materials.