

Georgia 4-H distributes Hero Packs to local youth of deployed military members

VALDOSTA — A local member of the Lowndes County 4-H Club recently delivered Hero Packs to family members of deployed military members as a part of Operation Military Kids.

Operation Military Kids (OMK), a partnership including Georgia 4-H, the Boys' & Girls' Club, Army Child and Youth Services and the Military Child Education Coalition, builds a network of support in Georgia to educate citizens on the impact of deployments on communities, families and youth as well as provides educational and support programs for children and youth of soldiers in our own back yard.

When the Defense Department mobilized the National Guard and Reserves, the youth in these families often appear the same as non-military families. However, these youth deal with new pressures and stresses often unnoticed by teachers, 4-H agents and staff, friends and other community members, causing them to need additional support and contact with others in similar situations. OMK also raises awareness for supporting these youth and families among business leaders, teachers, 4-H staff and other community members. One way OMK provides this support is through the packing and distribution of Hero Packs. Since June, 4-H'ers at statewide events have packed more than 900 Hero Packs for youth in deployed families. These packs include a backpack with items to deal with the stress of missing a loved one and to communicate with that loved one such as a disposable camera, an ink well pen, a 4-H Liberty Bear, a 4-H bandana, a journal and Georgia Friendship Bracelet. The Hero Packs also contains handwritten letters to the youth thanking them for their service and a "Parent's



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Pictured from left are Katie Walden, Johnathan Walden, Mallory Maslak, Claudia Walden, and Samuel Walden.

Pouch" with information about support for spouses of deployed soldiers and opportunities available locally through 4-H and the other OMK partners.

On Dec. 20, Senior 4-H'er and OMK Ambassador Mallory Maslak, delivered Hero Packs to 13 local children.

"My dad is retired from the USAF, so I understand how children with deployed parents feel," Maslak said. "It gives me a great sense of pride and appreciation for the families who received the Hero Packs."

Melinda Miller, Lowndes County 4-H agent, feels Hero Packs "provide comfort for the youth who have a parent deployed whether simply having a teddy bear to hug or using the enclosed camera to take photos of themselves to send to their deployed family member during this difficult time."

Families of deployed military members may still request Hero Packs by visiting the Georgia 4-H Web site at www.georgia4h.org. For questions regarding local distribution, please contact the Lowndes Extension Office at 333-5185. For questions about the Operation Military Kids

program, please contact the State 4-H Office at (706) 542-4H4H or oper4h@uga.edu.