

Soldier, you've got mail

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Military men and women serving overseas have a lot of little friends at St. Pius Tenth School in Chili.

On Jan. 26, students at the school made Valentine's Day cards for troops, including 1st Lt. Art Arieno, an Army Reserve physician's assistant serving in Kuwait. Arieno's daughter, Gabrielle, attends first grade at St. Pius, and said she enjoys being with her father when he's home.

"I like to play with him, and I like to wrestle with him," she said, adding that her father has taken her out for ice cream and given her gum.

In an e-mail response to questions from the *Catholic Courier*, Arieno wrote that he valued the cards and letters from family members.

"I have kept every piece of mail sent to me by my family and also my daughter's classmates," the soldier wrote. "It is very encouraging and uplifting to hear what the kids, especially my own, have to say since kids have such a unique and genuine way of putting things."

Indeed, St. Pius students making cards for the troops filled their messages with simple, heart-felt images and declarations. Arieno's niece, Danielle Arieno, a third-grader at the school, said she was drawing an "Army man" on her card. Her friend, sixth-grader Carol Connors, said she was drawing a "camouflaged heart" for the soldiers. Danielle noted that many of the students are sending cards to troops even though they don't know anyone overseas.



"Other people who are getting (cards) can see how children can pray for them and love them even though they don't know them," Danielle said.

This is the second time this school year that St. Pius students have sent cards to troops overseas, according to Stephen Oberst, principal. He noted that his students also sent Christmas cards to military personnel.

"These people, who are away from their families and friends, need to know they are not forgotten," Oberst said. "Our students also learn an important lesson about appreciating the sacrifice others make on their behalf."

It's apparent that lesson is sinking in with some of the students, including Joe Panek, a sixth-grader.

"Dear Soldier," Joe wrote on his card. "Thank you for helping to save my country. The weather here is freezing."

Tony said the students are writing the soldiers "to comfort them and so that they have contact from America."

That contact is important to the troops, according to Mayra Arieno, Gabrielle's mother.

"He's grateful that the kids are even thinking of him," Mayra said of her husband. She added that at her place of employment she recently or-

ganized a drive to send "care packages" to troops overseas. The packages were filled with magazines, books, videos and other items. The first lieutenant wrote that such items and letters from home often make him think about his loved ones.

"Does my daughter truly understand why her daddy is gone, and can I ever fill that void in her life?" the soldier wrote. "But without a doubt, that mail fills a void in my life that otherwise would remain."

Gabrielle's friend, first-grader Francesca Visca, said she has two uncles serving overseas, including U.S. Army Capt. Michael Langelotti, a field artillery officer with the 82nd Airborne Division. The captain is also Francesca's godfather, and is serving in Iraq. Like Art Arieno, Langelotti said he welcomes any contact from home.

"I particularly like the cards from the kids," he wrote the *Courier* in an e-mail, adding: "The innocence and hope expressed by the children is often a refreshment after long periods of work."

His sister, Kimberly Visca, said she and her siblings have sent Michael many items, including so much gum and breath mints that his



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

St. Pius Tenth School third-grader Danielle Arieno (left) and her sixth-grade buddy Carol Connors write Valentine's Day wishes Jan. 26 to military men and women stationed overseas. Danielle's uncle, 1st Lt. Art Arieno, is currently serving in Iraq.

fellow troops have kidded him that he must have had bad breath as a child. She added that her brother told her he often distributes the gum and candies to troops who may not receive such items as often.

Arieno wrote that he hopes people in this country, like the students at St. Pius, continue to remember the troops overseas.

"I am sure that I speak for all soldiers and especially for all fathers: WE LOVE MAIL."

Faith & Family Catholic Courier 1 Diocese of Rochester, NY | February 5, 2004

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