

## **Operation Paperback founder honored by president**

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Dan Bowers of York Township, a U.S. Navy veteran, understands the need for escapism while serving through tough times overseas.

His organization, Operation Paperback, sends books to soldiers in hopes that they will find comfort in the leisure of reading.

The response tells him the effort is worth it.

"Thank you for the books you have sent. They have helped us to escape from the madness, if only for a little while," read a note posted on Operation Paperback's Web site by a soldier who identified himself as Thomas S.

Back in 1999, Bowers' son-in-law, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Rick Honeywell, was dispatched to Kuwait for a four-month stint.

Bowers soon learned that the troops were living in tents with no real form of recreation. So Bowers and his family sent toys, games and playing cards.

But the item that sparked the most interest from the soldiers was the books. And Operation Paperback was born.

**Worldwide operation:** Now Operation Paperback has libraries for American troops set up all over the world, and it sends books out at a rate of 12,000 per month.

Bowers, a York Township resident, says the group will send its 600,000th book by the end of 2006.

"Regardless of your feelings about the wars we're involved with, the troops are young men and women who are obeying the call of service, and they deserve our support," he said. "The feedback we get from the soldiers is consistent in that they believe in what they're doing."

The organization's Web site offers addresses for those who are interested in donating books. The donor sends books directly to the soldiers. "It costs less for our volunteers to ship directly to the troops. Unlike many organizations, we strive to avoid the need to solicit funds," said Bowers.

Soldiers can make requests for particular books through the Web site, and Bowers says that the response is overwhelming.

**A flood of dictionaries:** "A chaplain stationed in Bosnia once said they needed dictionaries. Within a day there were 40 volunteers ready to donate dictionaries," said Bowers.

The White House recently recognized 10 leaders of volunteer organizations that support the troops. Bowers was one of them, invited to sit in the Roosevelt Room for an hour-long meeting with President Bush.

"What can I say about a routine visit with the most powerful man in the world? I expected that he would show up at the podium, speak for five minutes, and that would be it. I was surprised; It was really like we were sitting in a friend's living room," Bowers said.

Bowers said the president displayed a relaxed sense of humor.

Bush circled the table, shaking each person's hand. When asked how he chose the 10 leaders for the visit, Bowers said Bush replied: "If you're the most powerful man in the world, you don't have to explain how you make those decisions."

The hour-long meeting was followed by a private tour of the White House for the 10 leaders and their significant others. Bowers brought his wife, Shirley, who has been a major part of the organization as well. They were then invited to the Oval Office to take photos with the president.

"With 4,000 members and over half a million books sent, the future of Operation Paperback is bright," Bowers said.

"By the nature of it, we're continually expanding. Where the limit is, who knows."

Bowers, an engineer who was born in Johnstown, has lived in York County for seven years.

### **Book, money donations sought**

Volunteers from Operation Paperback will be at Manchester Township's annual Light Up Night, beginning at 7 p.m. Friday in Cousler Park, Church and Greenbriar roads, to accept monetary and book donations to be sent to U.S. troops overseas.

The township event also includes a performance by the Central York High School Brass Ensemble, a dedication to the U.S. troops by the Manchester Township Historical Society and a visit from Santa Claus.

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