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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VA Black Hills Employee's Dream Serves Her Fellow Soldiers

Last weekend appreciation events and activation ceremonies were held in the communities of Chamberlain, Mobridge and Pierre for members of the 200th Engineer Company. The South Dakota Army National Guard (SDARNG) unit will mobilize approximately 185 Soldiers to Afghanistan for a one-year deployment where they will perform both temporary and permanent bridging solutions. The 200th is a multi-role bridging company with a mission of providing personnel and equipment to transport, assemble, disassemble, retrieve and maintain all standard U.S. Army bridging systems. The unit is scheduled to report to Fort McCoy, WI, for additional mobilization training before departing the U.S.

When departing the U.S. they will pass through Manas Transit Center, Kyrgyz Republic, Kyrgyzstan. Every soldier, sailor, marine, and airmen headed to Afghanistan goes through Manas for 24-48 hours prior to their military flight to their assigned post. They are fed, provided shelter, and offered kindness, heartfelt thanks and well wishes as they proceed on with their journey. On an average, 3,000 young men and women journey through Manas every day as they travel either downrange or enroute home.

Upon their arrival at Manas they will be greeted by a fellow South Dakotan. Lori Vosika, OEF/OIF/OND program manager at the VA Black Hills Health Care System and a reservist with the United States Air Force, is currently stationed at Manas Transit Center. Vosika knew that they would be passing through Manas and wanted to be able to greet them with a token gift from South Dakota. Working through her contacts at the VA Black Hills Health Care Center, the South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and South Dakota's Veteran's service organizations, Vosika has made her dream a reality.

Leaders from these three groups met in Pierre and brought items to use for "Operation Goodie Bags." Along with donating goodies for the bags, the Veteran's service organizations also provided funding for the postage to ship these goodie bags to LTC Vosika. One of the items included in each of the "Goodie Bags" is a homemade "hug." "Hugs" are cloth wraps filled with crystals that expand when they are wet.

Soldiers wrap them around their necks to alleviate the intense heat. Volunteers from the Charles E. Thorne VFW Post 2038 Auxiliary in Pierre made all of the “Hugs” needed for “Operation Goodie Bags.” It is their goal to get everyone involved in supporting and honoring our military families. Everyone has a role to play in supporting military families – not just their friends and neighbors. Employers, educators, community leaders, government leaders, and health care professionals can all help support military families in unique ways. For more information visit www.mva.sd.gov or www.blackhills.va.gov.

Information and photos courtesy of South Dakota Army National Guard and South Dakota Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

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