

# Students write to soldiers in the Middle East

By Casey Hane  
staff writer

They're overseas, but not forgotten.

Students at East Middle School in Farmington Hills have taken a personal interest in the Persian Gulf crisis by writing letters to U.S. servicemen and servicewomen called to duty during the past several weeks.

Of the approximately 50 soldiers to whom students have written, six have responded, delighting the recipients.

"I was surprised," said Jeremy VanMeter, a seventh grader who heard from a 28-year-old sergeant who said the letter "brightened" her day.

"I am probably much different than the soldier you had hoped to reach," she wrote. "Nevertheless, I was very happy to hear from you."

Your letter brightened my day."

THE PROJECT is the students' way of reaching out to soldiers sent to the Middle East following the August invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. It has been a learning experience, said reading specialist Sue Vestre.

"Many (students) have never written or received a letter before," Vestre said. "It has given them a reason to write."

Vestre got the idea after reading in the newspaper that many soldiers in Saudi Arabia were receiving no mail. She decided to make a project of it.

Eighth grader Randy Ankawi had a special request from the soldier he wrote: "Send me a picture of yourself and your classmates if you can. I will hang them on the wall by your letter."

Randy said the pictures were on

*'I am probably much different than the soldier you had hoped to reach. Nevertheless, I was very happy to hear from you. Your letter brightened my day.'*

— 28-year-old female soldier  
in response to a student's letter

their way, and he appeared pleased with his newfound friend. "I didn't think they'd write back," he added. "I didn't think anybody would read it."

Vestre said students have not only learned about writing letters, but about Saudi culture and religious customs through the letters they

have received. It has opened a new world to them.

"The kids are really excited about it," added principal Bill Martin. "It's turned them on."

"You can read it out of a textbook and it means nothing, but because he (a soldier) took the time to write it, it really means something."



photos by SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

East Middle School seventh grader Jeremy VanMeter holds the letter he received from an American soldier in Saudi Arabia. He said he was surprised to hear from a female soldier.



Randy Ankawi, an East Middle School eighth grader, looks at the letter he received from a U.S. soldier in Saudi Arabia, as seventh grader Christina Boone looks over his shoulder.

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