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## Volunteers answer the call with donated cell phones to help military personnel



A higher calling -- Esther Wolfer and Spanish River High School senior Ron Amran load donated cell phones into Wolfer's car. The phones will be sold and the proceeds used to buy phone cards for soldiers serving overseas. (Photo/Michael Francis McElroy / April 4, 2008)

By Rachel Hatzipanagos | South Florida Sun-Sentinel  
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Stuart Wolfer spoke to his family at least once a month.

Though Wolfer was in the Army serving in Baghdad, they hoped he would be relatively safe. He was an officer. He didn't fight on the front lines.

Nothing could have prepared them for the knock on their door in April, the knock that every family with a loved one serving in the military fears. It was the casualty assistance officers.

Stuart Wolfer died in a rocket attack. He was 37.

Now, his parents, Esther and Len Wolfer, of Boca Raton, continue to work through their grief. Months before their son died, they started the Boca Raton branch of the national Cell Phones for Soldiers program. The charity collects donated cell phones, recycles them and uses the proceeds from their sales to buy calling cards for soldiers overseas.

"We knew we didn't want to stop this just because Stuart isn't in the Army anymore," said Esther Wolfer, who started collecting phones in October.

By the end of the year, she had sent 158 phones to the recycler. This year, she has received 500 and counting. There are drop-off points throughout Palm Beach County, including in Boynton Beach and Wellington.

"We have had an overwhelming response from the community since Stuart's passing," Wolfer said.

Her biggest donation has been from Spanish River High School in Boca Raton where students have collected more than 400 phones since December.

Teacher Dennis Sweetapple and his students coordinate one community service project a year.

"I asked the kids what they would like to do and they said something for the soldiers," Sweetapple said.

Student Jamie Bronson, 18, found out about the program online. She told Sweetapple, who contacted the Wolfers.

"We've had a huge response," Bronson said. A total of 240 Spanish River students put up posters and collected phones.

Dominic Gallardi, 16, who helped organize the project, was inspired by his father, who served in the Navy. "He wishes he could've called home more often," Gallardi said.

Pak Mail set up donation boxes at all 400 stores nationally, including Palm Beach County locations.

"We have stickers on the windows and I have a box set up front," said Boynton Beach Pak Mail owner Dominic Tozzo. "It's a good cause."

The students packed the phones into the Wolfers' car in early April. Wolfer will package the phones and mail them.

"I collected two phones that were in my house," said student Ron Amran, 17. "It's nice to see them get some use."

Rachel Hatzipanagos can be reached at [rhatzipanagos@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:rhatzipanagos@sun-sentinel.com) or 561-243-6621.