

Life

From here to Afghanistan

By **ADAM MARTIN-ROBBINS**
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Local students are sending messages of peace to thousands of Afghan children through their artwork.

Last fall, several children from Dufferin County participating in the DAREarts Children for Peace project created more than 3,000 handmade art cards to help raise the spirits of both Canadian soldiers and the children in Afghanistan. Each card contains messages and images representing children and peace.

Then, last month, students and staff at Westside Secondary School inserted each card with the message: we love you from Canadian children. The words were written in English as well as in Pashto and Dari for Afghan children.

Canadian soldiers will distribute the cards to children in towns and villages across Afghanistan to share the messages.

"It makes me feel good that I can share my art with people around the world, and it's not a publicity thing it's a peace thing," said Westside Gr. 12 student Jessica Pilgrim. "It's just amazing that a piece of art can make them feel so good."

Sgt. John Sideris, who dropped by the high school with a couple of other soldiers last week to pick up the cards, shares that sentiment.

"This is a complement to the rest of our efforts over there, it brings everything together," he said. "It think it's a wonderful thing... for the children in Afghanistan."

It's good for the soldiers too, Sideris said.

"To take time out when on patrol,



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DAREarts founder and president Marilyn Field (front, centre) was joined last week by DAREarts volunteers and staff, as well as staff and students at Westside Secondary School to hand off thousands of handmade art cards to three Canadian soldiers — Sgt. John Sideris (far left), Sgt. Bill Kowalchuk (right, back row) and Sgt. Gord Kowalishen (far right, middle row). The cards, which bear messages of peace, will be shipped to Afghanistan where troops will be passing them out to Afghan children.

especially in villages where the children are, and give something personal to them (Afghan children), it's a moment of pride," he said.

Throughout 2008, about 10,000 Canadian youth helped their peers in remote Canada and in war-torn areas around the world by creating and distributing original art cards through an initiative launched by the DAREarts Foundation.

It's just as beneficial to those who create the cards as those who receive

them, said Darearts Founder and president Marilyn Field.

"The single most important thing (about the program) is empowering our children to use their own creativity and caring for people to become better citizens," she said.

The initiative reaches beyond Canada to about one million children around the world who create art cards to send to other kids in war-torn countries as part of 'Centipede Children For Peace.'