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4-H 'Hero Packs' honor military families' sacrifice

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By ROBIN BROWN The News Journal

Khaila Taylor, 10, of Frankford, smiled as she loaded goodies into a backpack.

Khaila, a member of the Shining Stars **4-H** Club, was among about two dozen **4-H**'ers who gathered in Dover for a community service project to help other youngsters whose families are making personal sacrifices for their country.

The **4-H**'ers filled about 600 backpacks with teddy bears, disposable cameras, stationery and other items for children of military service personnel on active-duty deployment. They called the goodie bags "Hero Packs."

The creative assembly line at the University of Delaware's Paradee Center was among celebrations of National **4-H** Week, said Cooperative Extension Service spokeswoman Margo McDonough.

The idea, McDonough and **4-H** leaders said, is "to thank them for sharing their parents with all of America."

The first two Hero Packs were given to Casey and Jami Gallaway of Harrington, whose father is deployed with the National Guard's 160th Engineer Company from Middletown, said State **4-H** Leader Joy Sparks. Others will be given to children of military personnel at a variety of events this fall.

"Delaware **4-H** is pleased to join with the Dover Air Force Base and Delaware National Guard to reach out to the children and families of our deployed service people and include them in ongoing **4-H** experiences," Sparks told the teens. Four new **4-H** Clubs have been formed at Dover Air Force Base as a result of the initiative, she said, and those involved look forward to reaching out to more youngsters.

Sparks was one of several leaders who spoke to the teens as they assembled the Hero Packs. Delaware National Guard Adjutant Gen. Frank Vavala thanked the **4-H**'ers for supporting the state's deployed personnel and their children, and Lt. Col. Will Barnes, Delaware National Guard Family Program Director, told the **4-H**'ers the backpacks would have an important, positive impact on the young people who will receive them.

The "Hero Pack" project, held Wednesday in Dover, was part of the Delaware Military **4-H** Partnership, which began this year. This year also marks the 90th year of **4-H** in Delaware, where the first two clubs began in Kent County.

The **4-H** Club program, a federally sponsored youth development program that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2002, has worked for several years with the federal agriculture and defense departments, along with land-grant universities such as the University of Delaware, to develop resources for youngsters and their military families.

4-H is open to girls and boys ages 5 through 19 and, although the program began in an agricultural context, involves youngsters in urban and suburban areas in a wide variety of projects and activities.