

Operation Santa Claus sends gifts of support

by Lisa Bailey,
Contact Staff

Operation Santa Claus is sending support by the truckloads to deployed Canadian Forces members.

And 8 Wing/CFB Trenton's commander knows personally how precious the gift is to those serving in remote Canadian locations and overseas.

"Having received one of these boxes and speaking with others who have, I can say that it means a great deal, it really makes Christmas a lot easier," Colonel Russ Williams told those gathered by two tractor-trailers of donations at Brighton Sobeyes September 8.

"It's a connection to home and that link . . . to

the local community, it's hugely important," Col Williams said.

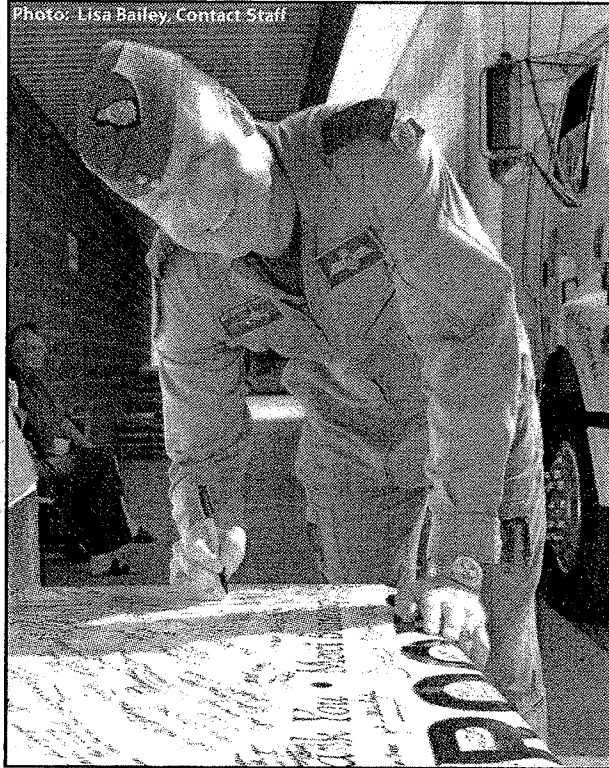
Thanking all those who contributed to and co-ordinated the effort, Col Williams declared that "it's really going to have an impact, there's no doubt about it."

In all, about \$85,000 worth of products ranging from water to deodorant were donated by various companies or purchased with money collected from the sale of \$2 cards to customers at Brighton Sobeyes and 14 other Ontario stores in the grocery chain.

Several banners, totalling about 2,000 feet in area, provided by Sobeyes and signed by the public, will also be distributed.

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Photo: Lisa Bailey, Contact Staff



Colonel Russ Williams, Commander, 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, signs a support banner at Brighton Sobeyes that will be sent to troops this holiday season.



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Patrick Begbie, manager of the Brighton store, said the OSC campaign ran for the month of August. It's the first time the Brighton store has taken part in the project, which actually began in the Angus area (near Barrie) three years ago.

Showing support for CF members is a natural fit for Brighton and area because of its proximity to 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, Begbie said.

"It's part of our community," he said. "The military is a big supporter of my store and it's a big member of our community."

That's evident with a look at the banners as they carry some personalized messages from families and friends of CF members.

Other signatories include children who symbolically traced their hands, people from other countries expressing they love Canada, and celebrities such as Johnny Bower who chose to host his last official golf tournament at the Roundel Glen Golf Club at 8 Wing. Both Roundel Glen and Brighton Speedway had one banner, with two more stationed at Brighton Sobey's.

He received an OSC package at Christmas 2005 while serving at Camp Mirage, a primary support base in the Middle East.

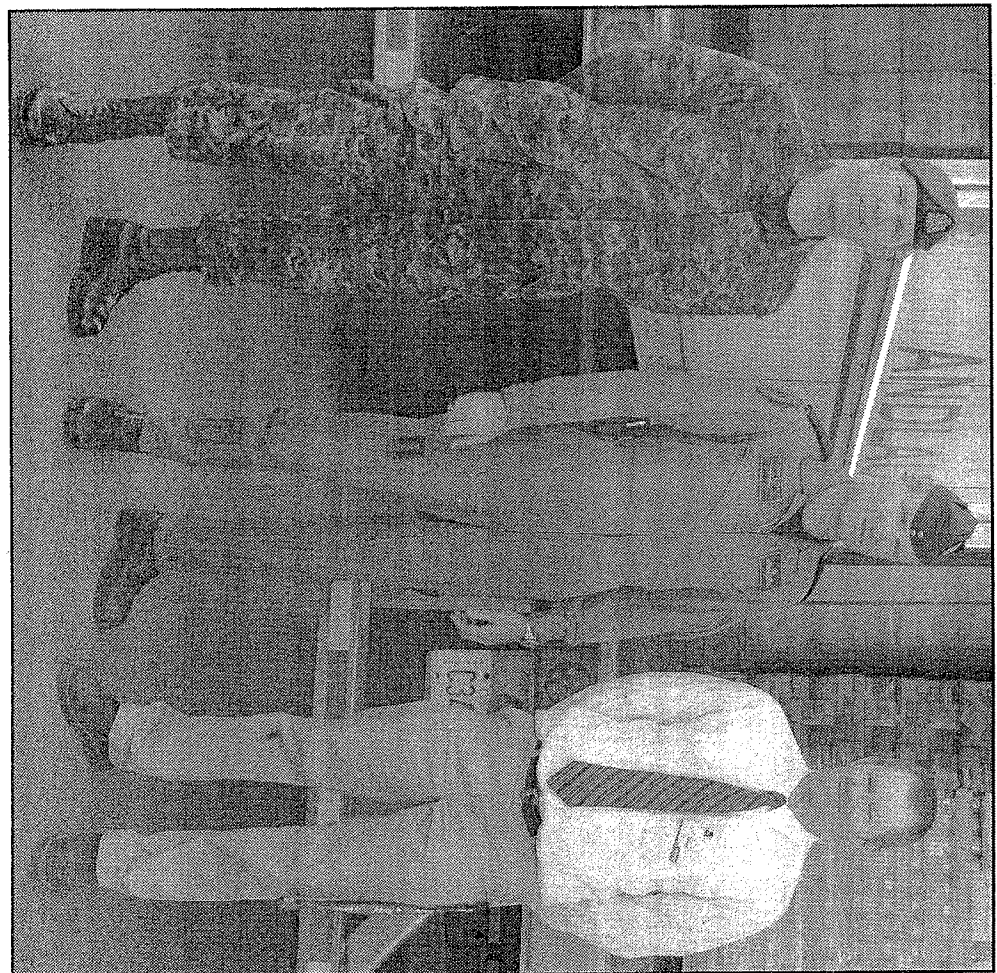
Moved especially by the "little notes from children," Col Williams said the package came as a very pleasant surprise to him.

The gifts were the talk of the base. "I was the commanding officer of the camp at the time and I know it made a very big difference to everyone who received it," he said.

The whole OSC effort conveys a special and touching message of compassion and support to CF members.

"It's really about the people that thought to do it," Col Williams said. The Sobey's shipment, which actually encompasses three truckloads, should arrive in Montreal within a week, Derouin said, adding the trip overseas should take about 70 days.

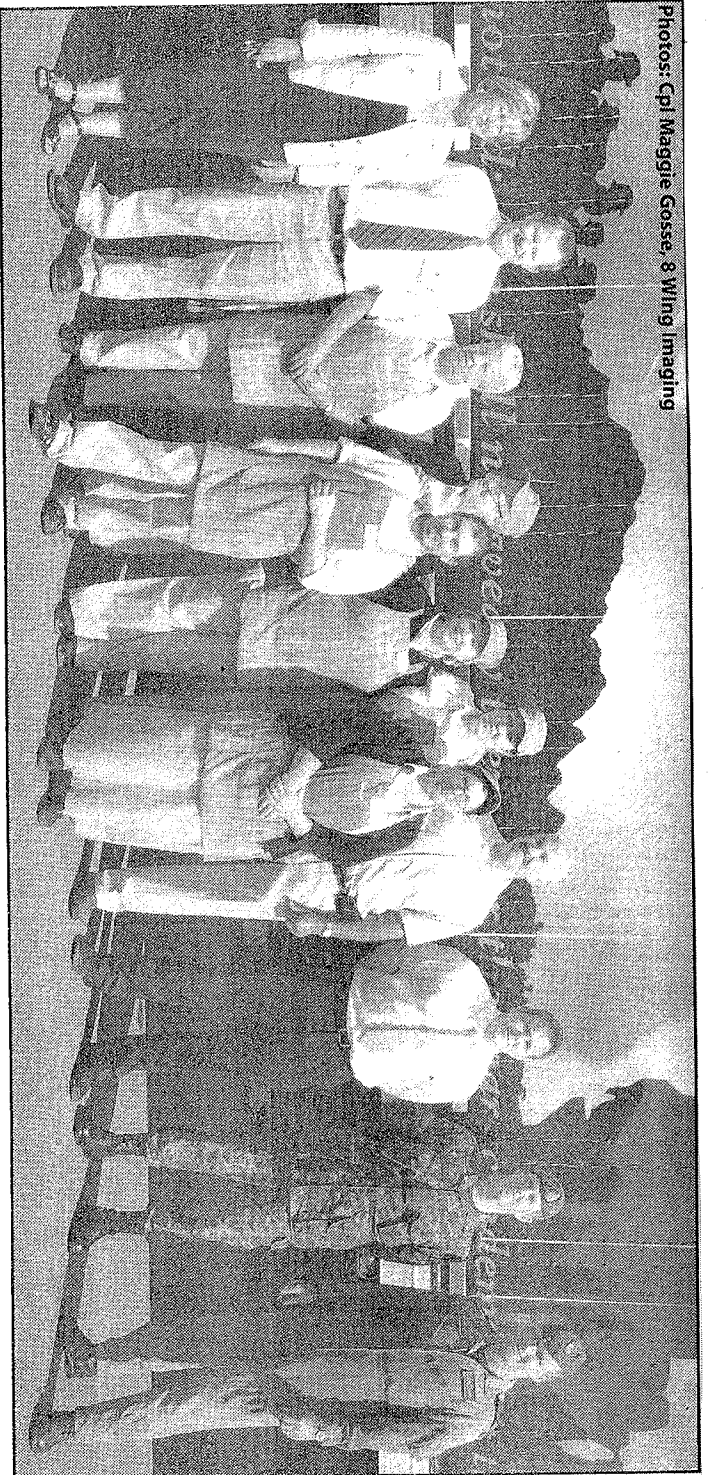
Right: Patrick Begbie (far right), Manager of Sobey's in Brighton, alongside Colonel Russ Williams, Commander, 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, and 8 Wing Chief Warrant Officer Kevin West with the presents gathered for Operation Santa Claus.



People continued to sign one of the banners at the store on September 8, including Col Williams and 8 Wing Chief Warrant Officer Kevin West.

Joining them in seeing the shipment off to Montreal were Northumberland-Quinte West MP Rick Norlock, Brighton Mayor Christine Herrington and Matthew Derouin, a Sobey's manager who started the project as a way to give back to his community which included nearby Canadian Forces Base Borden.

Derouin noted the campaign has grown from the initial donation of 12 skids of goods worth \$15,000 from the Angus area store where he worked, to this year's 61-skid shipment worth \$85,000 from 15 stores in Sobey's north and central areas as well as the lone eastern outlet in Brighton. The support of ordinary citizens and corporations demonstrates that people have been touched by the efforts of CF members and want to help.



Photos: Cpl Maggie Gosse, 8 Wing Imaging

Above: Gathered in front of International Truckload Services Inc.'s 'Poppy Truck' for an Operation Santa Claus celebration September 8 are Sobey's staff in Brighton with Col Russ Williams, Commander, 8 Wing/CFB Trenton, and 8 Wing Chief Warrant Officer Kevin West.

"Society in general has a great deal of respect for the Canadian Armed Forces and the men and women who serve our country so it's no surprise to me that this is something that would take off," said Derouin, who now manages a Sobeys store in Barrie.

He noted that when people "see what the (OSC) program is about and what we're doing, you almost can't beat it."

Founded in 1991 by a group of Montreal housewives wanting to send holiday packages to their spouses on peacekeeping duties, OSC expanded across Canada within a short period of time. In 1997, the Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency was tasked with supporting OSC and today, the program receives donations to serve up to 4,000 deployed CF members. Filled with items donated by Canadian corporations, the packages also include letters and Christmas cards from school children and loved ones. As Col Williams said, they bring a feeling of home to deployed CF members.

Below: The fronts of two transports from Andlauer Transportation Services are decorated for Op Santa Claus.

