



U.S.O. Coin Drive

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Our objective was to collect as much money as possible for the USO Care Package Program. Beginning with an assembly featuring the Ft. Meade's Army Color Guard presenting the Colors and performing a flag folding ceremony, GMS was taught about the USO. Mr. Tracy Steele, USO Volunteer Coordinator from BWI Gateway Airport, explained about the care package program and received our official "adoption" papers.

At the assembly, each team (6 teams in all) received a large plastic jug shaped like a bear to be used as a bank. Morning announcements made the project a friendly competition with each team vying for the most tonnage collected. The winning team chose student representatives to go to BWI Gateway Airport. Here the students, passed out goodie bags, met members of the armed services, presented 8th grade individual letters and our school chorus entertained the troops. Get-well cards, made by 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students were presented for men recuperating at Walter Reed Hospital. BWI is the main gateway on the east coast at holiday time, and thousands of troops were going through the airport that day.

More than a ton of coins (2, 093.5 pounds) were collected in these two weeks. The amount totaled more than \$5,018 almost a \$2,000 increase from the previous year. Gaithersburg Middle School will continue this project for as long as possible. The USO has a need for us and we want to help. One team of 6th graders won this year and they are determined to win in 7th and 8th grade too. So, they are telling incoming 6th graders who are still in elementary school to "watch out." Best practices:

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? This project focused on public safety issues and made students aware of the sacrifices our troops are required to make when they leave to protect our country. There were a number of men and women in our area being shipped overseas, some are our students' parents, and the USO, a non-profit volunteer effort, assists these people. The activities students carried out to help the USO and support our military troops taught them the value of service to our country and the importance of helping others.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? Each middle school grade in our school system is required to engage in tens hours of service-learning. Service-learning projects are infused into 8th grade world studies, 7th grade English, and 6th grade science. The 8th graders learned where the troops are located and what they are doing, while the 7th graders wrote letters to go in the care packages. The 6th graders

volunteered extra service-learning hours to count the money collected, write cards, and help Mrs. Emond.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? The spirit in our school provided continual impetus and a huge scale was drawn on a poster in the cafeteria. Each day the scale was colored in to show which team was leading and the total coins collected. Students discussed their efforts and progress. The impression made on the students was tremendous as demonstrated through their reflection writings. Sharon Emond, the coordinator for this project, was amazed by this year's effort. "These kids really understand. Whether you agree politically or not, they know they're representing our country and defending our freedom," said Emond, who read some of the 250 letters written by students and included in the goodie bags.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Each grade level team wanted to collect the most money to support the USO. Competition worked well as a motivator. Students worked hard to collect money, count money, put up flyers, make morning announcements and learn about the USO. Kids brought in birthday money, bar mitzvah money, and collected from relatives. Teachers gave matching incentives and some students quietly and privately found their own ways to earn money.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? We worked with Tracy Steele, Volunteer Coordinator at BWI Airport, and our contact with the USO. Mr. Steele got the Color Guard from Fort Meade to come to our school. At an assembly they performed the "Colors" and a "Flag Folding" ceremony.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Many preparations were done. Here is a timeline: 1. Evaluate from the previous year, put date on school calendar (Aug. 2003) 2. Set up a timeline to collect money and distribute packages 3. Assembly school-wide to teach purpose of USO and military service 4. Communicate with Tracy Steele 5. Instruct Principal and Instructional Council

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students have a better awareness of volunteer military service. They learned what a sacrifice men and women make to our country. They can, and did, learn about potential military careers. They learned about traditions, flag folding, uniforms, medals, and work done in the military. Students also improved their letter writing skills and money counting skills. Most of this project connected to a Character Counts! activity. GMS exemplifies the pillars of Character Counts! every day of the school year.