Operation PC Cares, a project that is over five years strong, will continue in Phillips County, now coordinated by the local Bank of the West branch in Holyoke.

“We didn’t want the program to stop,” said Deb Williamson, branch manager at Bank of the West. She and Linda Williamson will now head up Operation PC Cares with headquarters at the bank.

Since September 2007, residents of Phillips County have shown they truly care, making it possible for over 200 packages to be sent to servicemen and women through the Operation PC Cares program sponsored by Holyoke Chamber of Commerce.

**Linda Williamson and Deb Williamson of Bank of the West are heading up the Operation PC Cares project, which sends care packages to local servicemen and women who are deployed overseas.
—Enterprise photo**

Deb said they will continue to send care packages to deployed troops once a month. They will also send cards to those who are stationed in the U.S.

What they need now are the names and addresses of any servicemen or women who have ties to Phillips County. Right now they have around 10 names and know there are more servicemen from the area.

In addition to names, Deb and Linda will also be collecting items for the care packages as well as monetary donations, which can be dropped off at Bank of the West or the Chamber office in the Peerless Center.

Deb and Linda said it's expensive to mail the packages, but certainly nothing goes to waste. Goodies are quickly enjoyed by the servicemen and their fellow troops, and they share candies or toys with the children in the countries where they are deployed. Items like books and playing cards help them stay entertained while away from home, and letters or drawings always boost spirits.

Deb and Linda noted countries like Afghanistan will have weather similar to Holyoke's, with cold temps in the winter and hot temps in the summer.

They said it just made sense for them to continue Operation PC Cares at the bank, with ample space for storage of items and boxes. They look forward to packaging the boxes once a month and giving the troops a little taste of home.

Anyone who has names and addresses is encouraged to call Deb or Linda at 970-854-2297. Items can be dropped off at the bank at 125 S. Baxter Ave. in Holyoke.

Operation PC Cares items needed

- **Beef jerky**
- **Little Debbie snacks**
- **Cookies (in small bags)**
- **Hard candies**
- **Hot cocoa mix**
- **Rice Krispie bars**
- **Ramen noodles**
- **Jelly beans**
- **M&Ms**
- **Individual drink packets**
- **Paperback books**
- **Word/number puzzle books**
- **Magazines**
- **Children's letters**
- **Colored pictures**
- **Small stuffed animals**
- **Yo-yos**
- **Frisbees**
- **Dominoes**
- **Face/hand wipes (small pkg)**

Operation PC Cares has humble beginning

Mary Tomky, executive director of Holyoke Chamber of Commerce, and Josie Murray kicked off Operation PC Cares by selling magnetic ribbons the summer of 2007. With the fundraising dollars and monetary donations they collected, the team was ready to send packages to Phillips County's troops, mailing the first packages Sept. 4, 2007.

Even though they thought Operation PC Cares would be finished in about a year, continued

donations have made it possible for it to be an ongoing project. The Chamber reported that through December 2012, a total of 236 packages were sent.

In addition to Tomky and Murray, others who helped were Shirley Kadlec, Joyce Krueger and Levi Kurtzer. Many individuals, organizations, church groups and school children have donated or assisted with the project over the last five years. The local Girl Scouts also donated many cases of cookies for a couple of years.

On July 2, 2008, Capt. Jonathan L. Kleve presented the committee with a U.S. flag to show his support of the program. The flag, which now hangs in the Peerless lobby, was carried into combat during a successful direct action mission on Jan. 17, 2008.

Tomky said she has heard from many recent veterans who have told her just how much it means to get a package. “Overall, it’s a wonderful program,” she said. “We weren’t going to let it end!”

While Bank of the West is now coordinating the project, the Chamber will continue to be involved by broadcasting updates as well as collecting donated items.

Holyoke Enterprise January 31, 2013