Press Release

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Twenty-five years, and the Mountain of Toys at Fort Drum keeps growing

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Dec. 2, 2021) – A group of Fort Drum senior noncommissioned officers conducted a ruck march Dec. 2, carrying with them something that will bring joy to dozens of families this holiday season.

The trek from the Fort Drum Noncommissioned Officer Academy to the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers facility was in support of the annual Mountain of Toys program, and the senior enlisted Soldiers delivered more than 100 unwrapped toys to add to the growing collection.

Before leaving the NCOA, Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, 10th Mountain Division (LI) senior enlisted adviser, reminded NCOs that a foot march is “not what we do, it’s who we are!”

“As Mountain Tough Soldiers, we don’t need any incentive to go on an early-morning ruck march – but this was a pretty good one,” Terenas said. “The support from the community for the Mountain of Toys program has been amazing, and we were glad to be part of it.”

Shortly before the NCOs’ arrival, another formation from the 41st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, appeared at the BOSS center to empty out their rucks of toys.

Since November, community members have been dropping off unwrapped toys to collection boxes at the NCOA, Post Exchange, Clark Hall and other locations. The BOSS team purchased additional toys with funds provided by the Fort Drum Sergeants Major Association.

Cpl. Chris Jones, Fort Drum BOSS president, said that the boxes are monitored regularly and emptied when filled.

“We’ve been getting a lot of donations, which is really awesome,” he said. “One of the collection boxes had to be emptied two days in a row. We always like to have more toys than we think we will need.”

For 25 years, the Mountain of Toys program has assisted Army families who need a little support to get through the gift-giving season.

“It’s a great program that provides some toys for families who may be having a tough time this Christmas,” said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Joe McLaughlin, with the Fort Drum Sergeants Major Association. “The fact that our senior NCOs, first sergeants and sergeants major all got together to bring these toys here really shows their support to their Soldiers.”

McLaughlin, a former commandant at the NCOA, has been involved with Mountain of Toys since the beginning, and he said that he has no intention of stopping.

“A couple of times we thought of ending the program, but people keep contributing toys and donations,” he said. “So I think this is something we ought to continue to do, as long as we can keep helping our Soldiers.”

Terenas said he hopes that this one act of giving will inspire others to do more. He encouraged his senior NCOs to take care of themselves and to look out for their Soldiers during the holidays.

“This is all about taking care of one another, which is what we want to see across our formations this holiday season,” he said. “Whether that means donating to the Mountain of Toys program so that a family has a little more to put under their tree, or a Soldier checking in on his or her battle buddy just to see if they are OK, we can all make a difference if we are willing to make the effort.”

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Photo caption: Senior noncommissioned officers across the 10th Mountain Division (LI) conduct a ruck march from the Noncommissioned Officer Academy to the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers facility to deliver more than 100 toys for the annual Mountain of Toys program. Mountain of Toys is a Fort Drum Sergeants Major Association program developed 25 years ago to provide support to Soldiers and their families in need during the holiday season. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)