



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
Memphis District

# News Release

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## **Backpacks for Baghdad. Goal reached ... and passed!**

MEMPHIS, Tenn., March 28, 2005 – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with the help of community groups in Memphis, and Rock Island, Ill., recently collected more than 900 fully-supplied backpacks for schoolchildren in Iraq.

Tomorrow morning, March 29, at 10 a.m. at the Clifford Davis Federal Building in downtown Memphis, Memphis District employees will box up the backpacks for shipment, via FedEx and non-profit organization Operation Iraqi Children. The media is invited to view this high energy effort.

The Corps has had volunteers working in Iraq since the outset of the war and many get involved with the local communities where they are assigned. Such was the case with some Memphis District employees.

Last year, District employee Oney Pruett was working with several Green Zone schools in Baghdad when he took on a mission to collect 800 backpacks filled with supplies like notebooks, pencils, paper and rulers. In the end, stateside employees and local community groups collected more than 900 backpacks.

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“This drive is very important to me,” Pruettt said. “It’s another way we can show the people of Iraq that we care about them, their children and their future.

“But we couldn’t have made this happen without the outstanding help and contributions of communities up and down the Mississippi Valley.”

Help in collecting the backpacks came from as far away as students at Muscatine High School in Muscatine, Iowa, and as close as church and civic groups in the Memphis area.

“We really couldn’t have done it alone without the help of Idlewild Presbyterian Church, Grace-St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and school and the people in Rock Island (Ill.) and Iowa,” said Judy DeLoach, local coordinator and project manager and biologist for the Memphis District.

Col. Charles Smithers, commander of the Memphis District, expressed his support for all those who helped make this mission come together.

“I think this was a great opportunity for us, not just District employees, but volunteers from the Memphis community and others, to show Iraqis we really do care,” Col. Smithers said.

Operation Iraqi Children is an organization that works to provide school supplies to children in Iraq. It was formed by actor Gary Sinise and author Laura Hillenbrand (author of bestseller *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*). They have partnered with other non-profit organizations and FedEx to collect and transport the supplies to Iraq.