



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

# **Griffo, AT&T kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive**

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November 13, 2017

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UTICA – In honor of Veterans Day and Military Family Appreciation Month, Sen. Joseph Griffo was joined by AT&T and Central New York Veterans Outreach Center and military representatives today to kick off the annual Cell Phones For Soldiers collection drive. This is the third year that the drive has taken place.

For every donated phone valued at \$5, Cell Phones For Soldiers is able to provide 2 ½ hours of free talk time to deployed troops via calling cards. All proceeds from the recycled devices will be used to buy long distance calling cards for troops at home and abroad. As many as 200,000 troops are serving in the U.S. military around the world and by donating to Cell Phones For Soldiers, local residents and businesses can provide a valuable lifeline for America's bravest men and women to connect with loved ones back home.

With the collection drive lasting through mid-December, the community can help ensure more soldiers stay connected with their families. The holidays are traditionally the most important time for active military to keep in touch with family, and it's also a time when many people get new mobile devices, making this an ideal time to donate to this important charity.

The collection drive starts today and runs through Wednesday, Dec. 13. The public and businesses can drop off gently used and unwanted cell phones and/or tablets at collection bins in AT&T stores throughout the region and at several public locations throughout the senator's district. Those locations include:

- Jervis Public Library: 613 N. Washington St., Rome

- Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica
- Turning Stone Resort Casino: 5218 Patrick Road, Verona
- Herb Philipson's: New Hartford Shopping Center, 1 Center St., New Hartford
- Herb Philipson's: 1899 Black River Boulevard, Rome
- TOPS Friendly Markets: 7395 Lowville Heights Road, Lowville
- Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., Utica

#### AT&T Stores

- 4777 Commercial Drive, New Hartford
- 1319 Erie Boulevard W, Rome
- 224 N Genesee St., Utica

"Our brave troops give up their own time with their families and loved ones so that we can enjoy time with ours," Sen. Griffo said. "The least we can do is give them the opportunity to talk with their loved ones this holiday season. I would like to thank AT&T, Cell Phones for Soldiers and the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center for helping to kickoff this collection drive. I know that it will be successful and will show the courageous men and women in the military how much we value their service."

"We are honored to collaborate with Senator Griffo and Cell Phones For Soldiers again this year to encourage the community to join us and donate their used cell phones and tablets to give back to those that have given so much for our country," said Marissa Shorenstein, President, AT&T-East Region, "Helping to keep the brave men and women who protect and serve our country connected to their friends, family and loved ones, especially with the holiday season upon us, is just one way to honor and thank them for their courage and duty."

"It's always trying for families and others when their loved one is away from home while serving in the military, but during the holiday season it is much more difficult," said Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director. "Now, thanks to Sen. Griffo, AT&T and compassionate community members, we can help make things a little easier. I know that this show of generosity will help to make the holidays brighter for the men and women serving in in armed forces."

Cell Phones For Soldiers was founded in 2004 by teenagers Robbie and Brittany Bergquist at the ages of 12 and 13. The charity has since provided more than 300 million minutes of free talk time to servicemen and women stationed around the

world through its calling card program, Minutes That Matter. Funds raised from the recycling of cellular phones are used to purchase prepaid international calling cards. On average, Cell Phones For Soldiers distributes 1,500 calling cards each week to bases around the world, care package programs, deployment ceremonies and VA hospitals. Since 2004, Cell Phones For Soldiers has provided U.S. troops with more than 300 million “Minutes That Matter” and distributed more than 5 million prepaid international calling cards and have recycled more than 15 million mobile devices, reducing the impact on landfills. Recently, AT&T teamed up with the organization to connect even more service members to their families while deployed.

“Each year we have been humbled by the amount of people and organizations like AT&T and community leaders like Senator Griffo that take the initiative to support our military members and veterans,” said Cell Phones For Soldiers co-founder Robbie Bergquist. “The communication gap between military members actively serving and their families is a crucial need that Cell Phones For Soldiers is committed to addressing for years to come. As a charity, we rely on partnerships like these to continue our mission to connect our military members with their families while serving abroad.”

For more information on Cell Phones For Soldiers, please visit [www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com](http://www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com).

\*\*\*To prepare your mobile phone for donation here are some tips on how to erase all personal information that may be stored on it to protect your privacy:

- Remove your phone's SIM card Erase your address book, photos, messages and other stored information.
- Restore the device factory settings on your device.
- For instructions on how to do this, go to owner's manual or to the manufacturers' web site.

For more than 100 years, AT&T has been proudly supporting veterans, active military personnel and their families through various company initiatives. The company seeks to support military members and veterans at home as well as abroad. Multiple company initiatives focus on helping military members transition to the civilian workforce. These programs provide training opportunities and resources for servicemen and women, including the Veterans Employee Resource Group that provides an instant community for AT&T employee veterans.

Since 2007, AT&T and its customers have donated more than \$64.5 million and distributed more than 600,000 pre-paid calling cards to servicemen and women. Recently, AT&T teamed up with Cell Phones for Soldiers to connect even more service members to their families while deployed. Approximately half of the phones processed are reconditioned and reused. Phones and components that cannot be refurbished are dismantled and responsibly recycled to reclaim materials.