



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Sen. Griffo, AT&T, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center kickoff annual Cell Phones For Soldiers Collection Drive

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November 13, 2018



UTICA – In honor of Veterans Day, Military Family Appreciation Month and the upcoming holidays, state Sen. Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, was joined by AT&T and the Central New York Veterans Outreach Center today to kick off his annual Cell Phones For Soldiers collection drive.

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.

This is the fourth year that the drive has taken place. Last year's effort collected approximately 1,690 gently used cell phones and mobile devices, the most since Sen. Griffo starting doing the collection drive with AT&T. The drive in 2016 garnered 933 phones and devices, while 450 were collected in 2015.

The collection drive starts today and runs through Thursday, 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
- Utica Public Library: 303 Genesee St., Utica
- Chanatry's Hometown Market: 485 French Road, Utica
- Utica State Office Building: 207 Genesee St., 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
- Lloyds of Lowville: 7405 S. State St., Lowville
- VFW Post 6912: 7744 West State St., Lowville
- Marine Corps League Lewis County Detachment 754 Inc.: 7429 NYS Route 12, Lowville
- Sergi's Italian Restaurant: 10 Market St., Potsdam

AT&T Stores:

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

“The holidays are traditionally the most important time for active military to keep in touch with family, which makes this an ideal time to donate to this important charity,” said Sen. Griffo. “With the collection drive lasting through mid-December, the community can help ensure more soldiers stay connected with their families. 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, which will show the courageous men and women in the military how much we value their service.”

“For more than 100 years, AT&T has proudly supported veterans, active military personnel and their families through various company initiatives and has collaborated with organizations that provide these brave Americans with the vital services they need,” said Marissa Shorenstein, president, AT&T-North Region. “We are pleased to join forces with Senator Griffo, Cell Phones For Soldiers and the Veterans Outreach Center to encourage this community to join us by donating their unused cell phones and tablets to honor and thank all of the courageous men and women that protect and serve our country. During this holiday season, we want those serving our country to stay connected with their friends, family and loved ones at home.”

“The holiday season can be a difficult and trying time for those serving away from home in the military,” said Vincent Scalise, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center executive director. “Through this collection drive, we have the opportunity to make the holidays brighter for the men and women serving in in armed forces. I would like to thank Sen. Griffo and AT&T for their efforts in spearheading this important initiative and am hopeful that the community will donate their unwanted cell phones to this good cause.”

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.

***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 a century, AT&T has been proudly supporting veterans, active military personnel and their families through numerous 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. AT&T is committed to hiring 20,000 veterans by 2020, with more than 1,600 already hired across the country since 2013.

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. Phones and components that cannot be refurbished are dismantled and responsibly recycled to reclaim materials.