

Teenage singers help Kirk aid troops

By J.T. MORAND
STAFF WRITER

Members of Stevenson High School's Patriot Singers are helping U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, wish troops in Iraq and Afghanistan happy holidays.

Seventeen Patriot Singers recorded two Christmas songs — a cappella versions of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" and "The Carol of the Bells" — on Monday at the Midwest Young Artists Center at Fort Sheridan. The songs will be added to a compact disc entitled "Voices from Home."

Kirk of Highland Park, is an active Naval Reserve lieutenant commander. He wanted to wish the troops happy holidays in a creative way and let them know people at home are thinking about them, said Matt Towson, Kirk's press secretary.

The CDs will be sent to troops from the 10th Congressional District in upcoming weeks. Some will be available to the public for a \$10 donation, which will go to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Fund. The fund serves the needs of military families.

"We wanted to go to the District's best high schools," Towson said about inviting the Patriot Singers to participate. New Trier High School's choir also provided a recording.

The Patriot Singers recorded live for the troops on Monday. They did it in two takes. They could have done it in one, but they were distracted by the commotion caused by the media presence, some singers said later. Choir director Alice Nuteson said the coverage solidified in the singers' minds the importance of the event.

"It, I think, created a sense of 'This is actually a really big deal,'" senior bass L.B. Brodie said. The experience of recording songs for some of America's troops was unlike any other performance the Singers had ever done, he said.

"I felt like this one had more of a purpose," he said. "There was definitely a sense of patriotism going on, I think in all of our minds."

Senior soprano Jillian Ahrens said the Singers poured their hearts into the recordings because they knew the songs would be heard by military men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I think everyone was just focused on the recording and wanting to sound good for our troops," she said.

Sharing holiday cheer with the troops, albeit thousands of miles from home, was important for the Singers.

"I think it's an important cause," Stevenson choir director Alice Nuteson said. "It feels good to be doing

something like this during the holiday season."

Ahrens has participated in charitable causes, but she had never used her voice to brighten the lives of others before Monday. This cause had special meaning for her.

"Just knowing that my voice is going to be heard and knowing that people are going to be hearing my joy and my Christmas spirit ..."

For Brodie, the recording session was about more than spreading holiday cheer. "We're helping out our country," he said.

Kenilworth Union Church Choir, the First Corinthian Missionary Baptist Church Choir and Midwest Young Artists also contributed songs to the CD. Other tracks on the CD include Kirk reading the poem, "Christmas Bells," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; Congressional Medal Of Honor recipient Allen James Lynch, who served in Vietnam, expressing his own heartfelt thoughts to the troops; and Apollo VIII commander Capt. James Lovell reading from the Book of Genesis in the Bible, just as he did on Dec. 24, 1968 while orbiting the moon.

The public can order CDs by calling (847) 470-8900.

J.T. Morand can be reached at jtmorand@pioneer-local.com