

## THE SALEM NEWS

### SALVAGED COMFORT

Jail to clean blankets, sheets for Afghan orphans

By Ethan Forman  
Staff Writer

Blankets and sheets from the former Beverly High civil defense shelter may someday be used to tuck in orphans in Afghanistan, thanks to resourceful volunteers both here and abroad.

Mark and Janet Briggs and their daughter, Erin, brought about 300 sheets and blankets to be laundered at no cost at Middleton Jail.

The sheets and blankets are designed to go to two orphanages outside Kabul, where corrections officer Paul Atkinson of Marblehead is stationed as a sergeant in charge of maintenance at Camp Phoenix with the Massachusetts National Guard, 1-182<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. Atkinson has worked for the jail for 10 years.

At Camp Phoenix, he was ordered to dispose of 300 mattresses and bed frames, said his wife, Maria. They were married just six days before Atkinson shipped out in June.

Atkinson decided that instead of throwing out or burning the beds, they would better serve two Afghan orphanages, one with 400 girls and another with 300 boys, not far from the base.

The salvaged beds were delivered to the orphanages on a military flatbed truck, but they lacked bedding.

The sheets and blankets for them are being provided by the Brings family of Marblehead, who run the grass-roots Calling All Patriots Troop Support organization out of the living room in their Overbrook Road home. The group periodically sends care packages to troops.

Mark Brings, a union carpenter, wound up with the sheets after salvaging them from the former Beverly shelter where he worked on a job, but he did not know what to do with them.

It was Maria Atkinson who arranged for the sheets to be sent overseas, with the help of many others.

She first became acquainted with Calling All Patriots Troop Support after Atkinson began getting packages from the organization.

How the sheets wound up being laundered at Middleton Jail is another story.

Maria Atkinson put out word on her Facebook page about the need for sheets for Afghan orphans, and her plea wound up on the “All Marblehead” Facebook page maintained by Jack Attridge.

Missey Donohoe, a Marblehead resident who works at Middleton Jail and knows Paul Atkinson, read the post and drew the connection between Atkinson’s need for sheets for orphans with the Brings family’s efforts to help the troops.

Donohoe happened to drop off some old cell phones at the Brings home, an official site for the Cellphone for Soldiers program, which recycles old cell phones and uses the proceeds to buy phone cards for soldiers. She mentioned to the Bringses that Atkinson needed sheets for orphanages in Kabul.

“When she talked to Janet, Janet is the one who put things together,” Maria Atkinson said.

“‘I bet we could get the jail to wash these,’ ” Maria said, quoting Janet Brings. Others around town have also donated some sheets to the cause.

Atkinson plans to come home for two weeks in a few weeks, then head back to Afghanistan and come home at the end of March, said Maria Atkinson, who is thankful for what the Bringses have done for her husband.

“They are just caring, giving people,” she said.