



View photo by Owen K. Martin

GLEN CHRISTIANSEN of Avondale, a Web site designer, shows the homepage of www.amillionthanks.org, which he voluntarily created for A Million Thanks, a nonprofit organization that sends letters to troops.

Local Web designer helps national project

by **Kristen Smith**
staff writer

Glen Christiansen remembers his days on a Navy ship. Out in the middle of the ocean, seeing nothing but the rolling water and his fellow soldiers for days, weeks even, he remembers the loneliness and the need to connect.

"You kind of feel lost out there," Christiansen remembers.

So when a friend suggested he provide a Web site design for a new organization dedicated to delivering handwritten letters to men and women serving in the military, he volunteered.

He's even written a letter himself.

"I am a veteran and she was doing something for the troops," said Christiansen who moved to Avondale from California last year.

So for the last two years, Christiansen has been volunteering his time for A Million Thanks and its Web site, www.amillionthanks.org.

"What I do is regular maintenance, post press releases, and programming," Christiansen said.

And he does it for free. He only charges the nonprofit organization a small fee to host the large site.

The project was started by Shauna Fleming, a teenager from Orange, Calif., who was looking for a way to earn credits for a service project.

It started out locally and it started out small. Then the national media heard about the project and she was swooped up in a storm of national television and newspaper interviews.

"Of all the things we enjoy in the United States, regardless of what your beliefs are, it's basically a result of your soldiers both past and present."

— Glen Christiansen

The project also got much larger than anyone ever expected, said Michael Fleming, Shauna's father.

"It was a little overwhelming at first, but so far to date she's received over 2 million thank you letters to the troops," said Fleming, who says his role is carrying her bags.

She's also written a book, met the president and reached millions of Americans through her Web site.

The Web site averages more than 2,000 visitors a day and is an important way to spread the message, Fleming said.

"There wasn't any money at all to be able to do that and he said he really believed in what we were doing and he'd do it for free," Fleming said of Christiansen.

The site explains how ordinary citizens can get involved, examples of what to write and where to send the letters. There are links to other military support campaigns and updates about A Million "Of all the things we enjoy in the United States, regardless of what your beliefs

are, it's basically a result of your soldiers both past and present," Christiansen said.

Thanks.

And though it takes up a lot of his time, Christiansen is familiar with the urgency of updating Web sites. He is the principle in Christiansen Consultants now based in Avondale. It a business that designs, maintains and does programming for Web sites, said Christiansen who has approximately 50 clients, but is always looking for more.

Still A Million Thanks is important, he said.

He is also amazed by Shauna and her commitment, he said.

"It's pretty extraordinary for a teenage girl to accomplish all that," he said. "It makes me feel good to know I'm kind of helping the people who are where I was before."

And he's not done yet.

The Web site design is nearly two years old and he's itching to change it.

"As soon as they can squeeze away from sorting letters, we'll redesign the site," Christiansen said. "I've been begging to redesign it for several months now."

Fleming, too, wants an update, he said. Changing the format would allow the site to accept donations, add more video components and reach the public in a more timely matter.

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