Written by Daniel Fox, Senior Staff
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Anybody can get rid of their seemingly useless old cell phones while also helping our active troops and veterans keep in contact with their loved ones back home.

The Bloomington-Normal Association of Realtors (BNAR) started collecting cell phones for the Cell Phones for Soldiers (CPFS) program a couple weeks ago and will continue until Feb. 6.

Used cell phones can be dropped off with any local realtor, at any real estate office, at the BNAR office at 407 Detroit Drive in Bloomington or at the ISU donation box in the Veteran's Services office located on the first floor of Moulton Hall.

"Each phone is sent to Michiganbased ReCellular to be recycled, and the money is then used to purchase prepaid international calling cards," Karen Stailey-Lander, BNAR public relations chair, said.

"Each phone equates to approximately two and a half hours of free talk time for our troops."

At the beginning of each year, the BNAR committee members bring philanthropic ideas to be considered, and this year they voted to take part in the CPFS program, Stailey-Lander said.

“We are very excited to have the opportunity to do something to benefit our troops,” she added. “This is just one of the many ways realtors do more than sell houses.”

Veteran’s Services at ISU is helping BNAR collect cell phones.

“Veteran’s Services is always glad to help service members or provide additional benefits to them, such as collecting these phones for their use,” Judith Curtis, assistant university registrar at Veteran’s Services, said.

In 2004, with only $21 Robbie Bergquist, along with his sister Brittany, founded the organization at the young ages of 12 and 13, respectively.

“Cell Phones for Soldiers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing cost-free communication services to active duty military member and veterans,” Robbie Bergquist, co-founder and director of CPFS, said.

Since 2004, their organization has recycled more than 10.8 million cell phones. In 2012, 815,000 cell phones were collected, Bergquist said.

“We have businesses and organizations in every state that support us,” he said.

Bergquist started Helping Heroes Home, a program aimed at helping soldiers returning home, in 2012.

Additional information about the program can be found at www.cellphonesforsoldiers.com.