Determined school pals give all to help kids in Afghanistan

By ED HAYWARD

When President Bush called on America's schoolkids to raise money for the children of Afghanistan, Krissy Vitolia and Lindsay Peterson did so quietly and with a determination required by few of their peers.

Severely disabled since birth, the two young women, who cannot speak or walk, used computerized tools guided by their eye movements to design patriotic stationery their friends and families are now selling to bolster the president's fund.

"The president asked children to save their allowances or mow lawns to help out," said Marialice Curran, a teacher at Boston College's Campus School, which serves Lindsay, 18, Krissy, 21, and 42 other disabled students. "We asked what could our kids do. They can't mow lawns. But they can use their eyes."

So the pair, with the aid of staff and the BC undergraduates who volunteer 10 hours a week at the school, used the renowned "Eagle-Eyes" technology — developed by a trio of campus professors a decade ago — to craft the note cards they are now selling at 10 for $5.

Their creation might appear simple — a collage of red, white and blue stars — but it is the result of the two women working with sensors patched to their cheekbones, relaying the movements of their eyes to an electronic computer mouse that works like a paint brush.

"To the average person, the feat may seem small. For two young women trapped inside bodies that don't follow simple commands, it is taxing.

"You can't appreciate how hard it is to do this until you actually try it yourself," said Lindsay's mom, Kathy Peterson, of Quincy. "Lindsay has a very difficult time going to the corners. Even though it is fun for her, it is also difficult."

Three copy shops donated the costs of printing 1,100 note-cards. The cards will be sold along with other student crafts — such as dog biscuits, soap, wrapping paper and gift tags — at the school's annual craft fair Dec. 4 at the college's Campion Hall.

"They're trapped in their bodies," said Curran. "People think that cognitively they must match up to their physical appearance. That's just not the case."