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UMM has ties to local National Guard unit mobilization

Summary:

(September 13, 2004)-Putting a human face to the war in Iraq doesn't require much of a stretch of the imagination for most of us. We see the faces on each evening's newscast and when we open the pages of our newspaper.

We have served, or we know someone, or love someone who has served her/his country. We know their names. We think we know or we may indeed know the degree of their sacrifice, and that of their loved ones.

The human face of the war is surely more clearly defined when it looks us straight in the eye, closer to home when it touches us, and those we know and love best.

In early October, 60 members of the Morris National Guard Unit will be mobilized for eventual duty in Iraq. Among these daughters and sons, wives and husbands, sisters and brothers, friends there is a group who has a close connection to the University of Minnesota, Morris. Their dedication to service is not greater than the rest of the people who comprise the local unit's membership. But staff and faculty, students too, who have now returned to the business of learning and teaching on the campus for another nine months may not know each member of the local unit. We do know, however, something about those with a UMM connection. While there may be others, the following are excerpts from conversations with those who chose to be interviewed.

UMM senior Todd Sanchez has only 15 credits to complete in order to graduate next spring with a political science major. Now, he says, his plans for graduation and completing his education are on hold. He is a specialist with 13 Bravo, a cannon crew member trained in towing and operating a howitzer. He believes that he may serve as a member of a task force in Iraq.

Todd comes from a Wichita, Kansas family whose members have served in the military: an older brother who has returned from Iraq, a younger brother who is a combat engineer with the Marines in Iraq, an uncle who is a sergeant major. Todd, the son of Dan and Lorena, also has a sister, and another brother who died accidentally last year.

"I came to UMM from so far away to wrestle," shared Sanchez. "I learned what a good school UMM is, and that it was good to come here from such a distance." Sanchez was named an All-Conference wrestler (UMM was then in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference) during his freshman and sophomore years.

"Now," said Sanchez, "my education will have to wait."

There are others who will join the local unit. Among them are UMM alumni Mark Mattheis '80, Anthony Schuster '02, and Mack McLarty '03.

The sons of two UMM staff members, Brian Brummond and Tom Swenson, will also be deployed.

“We just found out in May about the alert orders, but it still didn’t prepare us for the actual word from Josh when he confirmed that they were indeed going over,” said Brummond. “It was very hard and emotional when he told us. He is prepared to go, he is proud to serve his country, but it still is not an easy thing when reality hits that he will not see loved ones and friends for such a long time.

“He is excited about seeing something new, another part of the world, but he knows how dangerous it will be and that there is a lot of hard work ahead,” said Brummond, who works as the sports information director at UMM. “Diana and I and our entire family are extremely proud of Josh, and we support him 100 percent. We all pray that Josh and his entire unit return to their family and friends safely.”

“My son, Bryce, is being activated with the unit to serve 18 to 24 months,” said Tom Swenson, who works as a custodian at UMM. “Bryce is a student at Minnesota State University at Moorhead, and will have to put his college days on hold. He likes being a soldier and was recently selected as his battalion’s Soldier of the Year.

“I am very proud of Bryce and have always been supportive of all his endeavors,” added Swenson, who has been a member of the National Guard and Army Reserve for 21 years. “I pray that God keeps Bryce and his comrades safe throughout their duty until they return home to us.”

Other campus staffers who are making a contribution shared their thoughts. Nancy Helsper's husband, John, is the commander of the Morris American Legion, one of the local service organizations who has supported the local guard unit by hosting suppers and other special events, selling support magnets and more. Nancy is the director of institutional research at UMM.

Ann Kolden’s husband, Paul, just returned from a NATO mission in Kosovo. Ann, who works in the Division of Science and Mathematics, shared that the families of those who are deployed may feel that they can’t or don’t want to ask for help.

“I found that the most helpful and caring thing that anyone ever did for me and my family while my husband was gone was to just take the initiative and do something kind,” said Ann. “The local firemen pooled money from their own pockets to fly my husband home for Christmas...mystery men in black ski mask showed up on snowy mornings in the winter to clear my driveway...the lawn would be mysteriously mowed when I came home from work...This is a wonderful community and the outpouring of support has been amazing. If you want to help in some way, don’t ask just do it. We certainly appreciate all that people have done for us. We were very blessed.”

UMM is proud to have been chosen as the site for an event being organized by the family support group for the Morris National Guard Unit. The event will be held at 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 18, in the P.E. Center gymnasium on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Morris. For its part in support of the local unit, families and friends, UMM will defray the costs for renting the facility, and for custodial time to set up and tear down for the event, as well as rental costs for media services equipment. The event is open to the public.

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