

Heroes rally set to thank troops

Freedom Calls teleconferences will give families the chance to talk to loved ones in Iraq.

By [Matt Cunningham](#)

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WEST CHESTER TWP. — West Chester Twp. resident Ron Wegmann said the idea for Saturday's Heroes Celebration came to him after a year of looking for a way to say "thank you" to the area's soldiers and veterans.

"Basically, four or five months ago I was getting frustrated," he said. "I heard there were a lot of people taking hits, both in Iraq and at home."

As Wegmann gathered support for a troop-centric celebration, he learned about Freedom Calls, an organization that helps deployed soldiers and their loved ones communicate by live video feed. The idea fit with his plans.

"This is about letting them know we really do care," he said. "I don't think they get enough of that."

With the help of a small army of volunteers, Wegmann coordinated a number of activities for the event. A fleet of 300 flag-adorned motorcycles will visit the park, and Coldwell Banker will launch its "Trick or Treat for the Troops" DVD drive. Skydivers and vintage warplanes will perform, and live music is planned all day.

At the end of the day, troops will be able to watch, via live video, the night's headline concert by classic rock band .38 Special. Wegmann said the band agreed to perform on only a week's notice.

"They're doing this because they want to, and we really owe them a debt of gratitude for that," he said.

The night will be capped off by Rozzi's Famous Fireworks, donated by West Chester Twp.

"We really want to celebrate our veterans and those serving overseas," said township communications officer Barbara Wilson.

But the day's main activity is the Freedom Calls teleconferences. Freedom Calls will have links to five locations in Iraq: Camp Taji, Al Asad Air Base, Camp Fallujah, Camp Victory and Camp Taqaddum. Family members will be able schedule one of the 100 half-hour slots to see and talk to their loved ones for free.

Freedom Calls volunteer Kris Brannock said organizers hope to accommodate cancellations, schedule changes due to duty changes and late arrivals wherever possible.

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