

Visit is a great-grand surprise

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MILFORD — Dorothy Paul has seen many things in her 95 years, but on Friday she saw something new — and someone dear. A whole lot of dear someones, actually.

Friday was Paul's 95th birthday, and she thought she was going to get a package from her granddaughter.

But the best birthday gifts that surprised her at Carriage Green at Milford, an assisted-living home on Plains Road, weren't in a box, and the biggest surprise of all was beamed in from Iraq.

There were about a dozen of her family members, many friends and, on a computer screen via satellite and Web cam, her great-grandson Chris Davis, a 26-year-old U.S. Marine sergeant who was shipped to Iraq more than two months ago.

Paul said she tries to think positive as much as possible: "I try not to use the word, 'worry.' It's too negative." But she has been concerned about Davis.

"I pray for him every night," she said, surrounded by loved ones, balloons and birthday cake. "I was just overwhelmed to be able to see him and then to be able to hear him and converse with him was a special treat. This whole thing has been a special treat."

The video teleconference with Davis, who leaned toward the camera in combat fatigues and indulged in constant conversation with family members, was a surprise birthday gift made possible by Freedom Calls Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit organization that links military families with their loved ones in Iraq.



At Carriage Green, an assisted living community in Milford, resident Dorothy Paul, seated at right, was thrown a surprise 95th birthday party on Friday during which her family set up a video teleconference with her great-grandson, Sgt. Chris Davis, who is currently serving in Iraq. Dorothy talked with Chris via the laptop in the facility's recreation room along with her granddaughter Kyle Eckman, center (Chris' mother), who was sending him a kiss. Looking on at left is Carriage Green Director of Community Relations Susie Nolan. From right above Dorothy was great-grandson Adam Ballard, granddaughter Kathy Nuckoles, and friend of the family Brad Weldon. (Tracy Deer-Mirek/Staff photographer)



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Carriage Green pitched in and bought the Web cam for the occasion, grateful family members said.

Paul has lived in Milford since 1922, attending First United Church of Christ and raising her only daughter, Barbara, here. Barbara Mockler died about a year and a half ago, and that was the last time the family was together.

Granddaughter Kyle Eckman said she came all the way from Georgia to see her grandmother. She grew teary-eyed as she spoke of feeling "ecstatic" to see her son in uniform and to know the sight of him made her grandmother happy. Other family members came from Alabama, New York and Virginia.

Great-grandson Matthew Eckman, 29, Davis' older brother, called Paul "an incredibly loving person.

Maybe that's why she's lived for 95 years.