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Morristown charity connects families to soldiers with free videoconferences

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This holiday season, soldiers serving in Iraq and their loved ones back home will have a chance to have a face-to-face, private, 30-minute videoconference on Dec. 13 through a project called "Mission: See Your Soldier."

However, families must make their request known by 5 p.m. Friday. The project can accommodate approximately 130 on a first come, first served basis.

The service is offered free to families in seven states, including New Jersey, and is presented by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity based in Morristown dedicated to connecting soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan with their families in the states via satellite.

Host companies Glowpoint, TANDBERG, and MSpace announced Monday that they will provide their technology for videoconferencing in cooperation with the foundation's effort.

The videoconferences will be held from various locations in the United States. Glowpoint, Inc., which is at 225 Long Avenue, in Hillside is the only New Jersey location, and the only site where New Jersey residents will be accepted. In Iraq, there are five participating military installations, including Camp Taji, Al Asad Air Base, Camp Fallujah, Camp Taqaddum, and Camp Victory in Baghdad.

"On a personal level, this is a win-win situation. We're able to use our technology to give back to the families of New Jersey," said Christopher Welch, executive coordinator of Glowpoint, Inc. "The reason we're making this free is because we know that families of all financial backgrounds are affected by this war."

Charlie Daniels, a country music star who has performed for troops in both Iraq and Kuwait as part of the Stars and Stripes tour, will also participate by calling troops stationed in Iraq.

"I am deeply honored that I will be able to take part in the "Mission: See Your Soldier" project and make video calls to the troops stationed in Iraq," Daniels said. "I am happy to be a part of bringing families together at Christmas time, especially when their loved ones are so far away protecting our country and our freedom."

The Freedom Calls Foundation, which is supported through donations from corporations and private citizens, serves 40,000 soldiers at all hours of the day and night at no charge to the soldiers or their families. Recently, the Army asked the foundation to equip eight more facilities in Iraq as well as two in Afghanistan.