

Technology enables Iraq Marine to meet new daughter

[By Ashok Selvam](#) | Daily Herald Staff
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Thanks to satellite technology, Schaumburg's Monica Galarza received an early Mother's Day gift much more satisfying than brunch.

Galarza gave birth by Cesarean section at 8:43 p.m. Thursday to 8-pound, 12-ounce Luciana Rae.

Despite the proximity to Mother's Day, the timing wasn't exactly perfect: Galarza's first child came into the world without the presence of her husband, Marine Gunnery Sgt. Raymundo Galarza Jr., who's stationed some 8,000 miles away in Iraq. He's been away from home since September.

"He wasn't here for any part of the birth, any part of the pregnancy," Galarza said from her hospital bed at St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates.

But Friday morning -- thanks to what Alexian Brothers Health System spokesman Matt Wakely called a "logistical miracle," with hospital staff scrambling to establish proper computer networking connectivity -- Sgt. Galarza was connected with his wife and saw his daughter for the first time, via videoconference from the hospital to Baghdad.

The new mother's eyes welled up upon the first glimpse of her husband on the video screen.

"It meant everything. Since he couldn't be here, (it) was the next best thing we could have," she said.

Luciana Rae slept for most of the 90-minute teleconference. She opened her eyes toward the end, prompting her father to make baby faces at the camera.

Monica Galarza, 33, is a social worker at Field Elementary in Wheeling. Her husband, serving in his second stint in Iraq, is a social worker at Schaumburg High School. The couple married in 2004. They haven't seen each other since December.

"He's gotten thin," Monica said.



At St. Alexius Medical Center, Schaumburg's Monica Galarza shows off her newborn daughter Friday during a teleconference with her husband, Raymundo Galarza Jr., a Marine stationed in Iraq.

She isn't able to communicate with her husband on a regular basis and doesn't know when he'll return home.

The conference was set up by Freedom Calls Foundation, a New York nonprofit that uses donations from computer software and hardware companies to link family and friends to their loved ones serving the military overseas.

Monica Galarza said a coworker told her about the group, and she's been in contact with them for months. The teleconference was her only special request to hospital staff.

"I'm really happy there are things like this that can help the families out here, especially the wives who are back home while our husbands are out there," she said. "They're doing their jobs, but this is a little something special that they can give us."