

The Gardner News

Teleconference foundation looking for support from civilian public

By Ernie King - News Staff Writer

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GARDNER — John B. Harlow II, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation, said he got the idea for organizing the foundation after hearing about a soldier stationed in Iraq who ran up a \$7,000 cell phone bill calling home.

Mr. Harlow said after hearing that, he decided to start a state-of-the-art communication network that allows military personnel serving in a combat zone to electronically visit with their families free of charge.

“we have handle about 2,000 video calls per month,” Mr. Harlow said. “We have had fathers watch the birth of their first child, we have had parents see their son’s graduation and any family event that you can imagine.”

Mr. Harlow said the foundation now has five centers in Iraq to handle the conference calls, and the word about the service they are offering spread around quickly.

He said the organization has to maintain a satellite to keep the phone service operating 24 hours a day, which is very expensive.

“It costs us tens of thousands of dollars a month to maintain the service,” he said. “We dearly need funds. We do not get any support from the military; we depend on the American public and the business community. Our services are needed. Some of these guys are on their third and fourth deployments. It is particularly important that we support them.”

Mr. Harlow extended his thanks to the college for allowing them to use their facilities.

“We have about 100,000 military family members that depend on our efforts at this point,” he said. “We need funding. Our satellite provider is not donating the satellite time.”

Mount Wachusett Community College President Dr. Daniel Asquino said they heard about the program and thought that the idea of linking military personnel up with their families via video conference was a great idea.

“We were excited about the possibility of joining the organization,” Dr. Asquino said. “We decided we would be available for any of the families that have relatives in Iraq for one of these. It really means a lot to a person stationed in Iraq.”

Mr. Harlow said that anyone wanting to assist the foundation can make a donation online at freedomcalls.org or by calling the foundation at their Morristown, N.J. headquarters at (973) 290-7886.