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School Notes

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The **Council Rock School District** is offering military families the chance to see and talk to their loved ones overseas as part of a free videoconference service offered in partnership with Freedom Calls Foundation, a national nonprofit organization.

Operation Hometown Link connects military families with Camp Taji, Camp Fallujah, Camp Al Taqaddum, Al Assad Air Base and Camp Victory in Iraq. Families can schedule an appointment through the district, come to Chancellor Center, and spend time with their loved one.

"We see this as a service to the community," said Larry Kling, Council Rock's supervisor of instructional technology. "It's a way of giving back."

Freedom Calls is a New Jersey organization founded by John B. Harlow II, who grew up in Richboro. The four-year-old organization leases satellite time and has installed satellite dishes and other equipment at the five Iraq military bases.

The organization has 10,000 Operation Hometown Link sites throughout the U.S. in school districts, law firms, colleges and National Guard barracks, Harlow said. Freedom Calls also will help individual families set up videoconferencing in their homes if they have an updated computer. Council Rock is the only Hometown Link site offering the service in Bucks County and no individual home-based sites are currently operating in the county, Harlow said.

"I formed this network in 2003 when I heard about a soldier with a \$7,000 telephone bill," Harlow said. "I thought that was outrageous when these people are sacrificing on our behalf."

The foundation provides 1.5 million free minutes of telephone service per month to military families, Harlow said. Military parents have been able to virtually attend their children's graduations and two dads serving overseas have coached their wives through childbirth during a Freedom Calls connection.

The organization is funded through donations and has the usual nonprofit woes when it comes to money.

"We are always on the edge," Harlow said. "There are three of us who run this out of our living room in New Jersey."

Local families wishing to access the service must fill out an application and coordinate an appointment with the district and their loved one overseas, Kling said. He began investigating a possible partnership when he read about Freedom Calls during a distance-learning seminar at the Bucks County Intermediate Unit.



Freedom Calls founder John B. Harlow II. The nonprofit joined with Council Rock so military families can see and talk with loved ones overseas.

The district already had the equipment required and had previously used its videoconferencing technology to connect students with troops serving in Iraq.

For information and an appointment call 215-944-1082, email lkling@crsd.org or visit www.crsd.org (click on the "Resources" drop-down menu) or www.freedomcalls.org.

Brian Knecht, 19, of Bensalem, won a silver medal in the welding division of the SkillsUSA national competition, held June 24 to 27 in Kansas City.

SkillsUSA is a national organization that prepares students for careers in business and industry.

Knecht, who graduated from **Bucks County Technical High School** in June, won first place in the state competition held April 2-8 in Hershey, which qualified him for the national contest. He won a Lincoln Power MIG 180 (a welding machine), work clothing, a scholarship to continue his welding education and several welding tools.

Jason Doran, also of Bucks County Tech, placed sixth in electronic applications, and Christian Roberts, another Bucks County Tech student, served as a state officer during the national competition.

Bucks County Community College has expanded its online course offerings, added new classes and will offer a new degree program in Digital Game and Simulation Design.

New online courses include Human Anatomy and Physiology I, English Composition II, Principles of Economics - Micro, Language Development, Historic Preservation Field Studies and Physics I. The college already offers 150 online courses. Three new courses will be offered in a "hybrid" format (a mix of on-line and face-to-face learning) including Network Administration, Oral Interpretation and Introduction to Industrial Distribution.

In August, a new 62-credit degree program in digital game and simulation design will be offered. The program will prepare students for careers in the digital media industry such as entry-level game programmers, quality assurance testers or level designers.

New classes scheduled to be added to the school's curriculum include the Photographic Image in American History, Elementary Spanish II for Heritage Speakers, Current topics in Biotechnology and Islam, Judaism and Christianity: Holy War, Holy Peace.

Registration is underway for the fall semester which starts on Aug. 27. The school has campuses in Newtown, Bristol and East Rockhill Township. For information call 215-968-8100 or visit www.bucks.edu.

- Kristin E. Holmes