

## Smiles aplenty as families talk with troops in Iraq

BY BETH PRATT  
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A big smile on the face of Marine Lance Cpl. Jonathan Munoz matched the smiles of 11 family members - including his bride, his mother and two brothers - who chatted with him Tuesday morning via a video Holiday Freedom Call provided by AT&T Foundation (formerly SBC Foundation).

"It was wonderful," Rachel Munoz, his mother, said. "He is looking good, more than what I expected to see."

Dolores, his wife of one year, echoed her mother-in-law's "It was wonderful" to see him and I was amazed at the improvement in technology.

"My brother was there when war was declared, and they didn't have this," she said, acknowledging that it was hard to say all she wanted to say to her husband with a group present.

She is living with her mother, Maria Rocha, in Hart while Munoz is in Iraq. He is scheduled to return in mid-March.

Etched on their faces after the video visit is the joy of seeing and talking with Munoz, coupled with anxiety that comes of knowing that, as a convoy driver, he is in constant danger.

Their priest, Father Lupe, at St. John's Catholic Church in Hart, is among those who are praying for him, Dolores Munoz said.

AT&T donates its video conference equipment and members of the Pioneers, made up of retired and current employees, donate their time to see that the real-time visual contact with the soldiers' families goes smoothly.

Donna Florez is president of the local group of Pioneers and in January takes office as president of the West Texas Council.



**Beth Pratt / Staff**

Marine Lance Cpl. Jonathan Munoz speaks with 11 members of his family, including his bride of a year, Dolores, Tuesday morning from Camp Fallujah in Iraq via AT&T (formerly SBC) video conference equipment, the first time a Holiday Freedom Call station has been offered in Lubbock.

The hardest thing, she said, is to tell a family a soldier is still out on mission and can't get back for his scheduled call.

"Some soldiers scheduled today were deployed yesterday," she said, tearing a bit as she acknowledged the families' disappointment.

She has "knocked on the doors" for two years to convince the company that Lubbock should provide the Holiday Freedom Call program.

"(Florez) is a doer and a goer," Pioneer volunteer Linda Williams said.

Florez disputed the rationale that a successful event required a larger city and a military base. To have a center, a minimum of five families must be signed up. Her confidence was vindicated when 27 people responded, more than in San Antonio, which has six military bases, she said.

Some family members came from Houston and Dallas to participate in the calls. They came from Dumas, Amarillo and Odessa. The Munoz family is from Plainview.

AT&T has been given the go-ahead to do it again sometime in January, Florez said.

"One soldier got to see his son walk for the first time," Florez said, describing how the family placed the child on the table so the father could see his toddling steps.

The Pioneers learned one soldier was celebrating his 21st birthday Tuesday and ordered a birthday cake. Although technology won't quite let him taste it, he can watch his family enjoy it.

One family brought the Christmas gifts the mother had sent her children from Iraq so she could watch via video while they opened the packages.