

# The Patriot-News

## Freedom Calls enables soldier to watch son's birth from Iraq

### Freedom Calls, soldier answers, watches son's birth from Iraq

Tuesday, September 09, 2008

**BY DAVID WENNER**  
**Of The Patriot-News**

Amanda Wertz cradled her baby and told her husband, "He looks like you."

"He has a lot of hair," Andrew Wertz replied.

It was unusual only because the new parents were 7,000 miles apart.

Amanda Wertz was in a bed at Holy Spirit Hospital on Monday. Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Wertz was in Iraq.

They communicated by way of a videoconference arranged by Freedom Calls, a charity that gives soldiers a way to see and speak to loved ones free of charge.

This was the second time Andrew Wertz, 21, had seen his first child. On Sunday, he had a bedside view of the birth.



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Amanda Wertz, 20, of Marysville, with newborn son Bradley, talks to her husband, Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Wertz, on the video hookup at right on Monday. Wertz has been deployed to Iraq for two weeks.



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Amanda Wertz, 20, of Marysville, and her newborn son Bradley.

A Holy Spirit information-technology employee had contacted him shortly after Amanda Wertz, 20, began labor early Sunday.

He stayed connected for the next 12 hours, sitting in a room in Iraq where the temperature topped 120 degrees.

A Web cam and audio hookup next to his wife's bed enabled him to see and speak to her. He urged her to "push."

Amanda Wertz could watch her husband's face on a laptop computer screen.

"He was telling me that everything was going to be OK," she says.

The Marysville couple's son, Bradley, was born at 3:36 p.m. Sunday.

Freedom Calls, a New Jersey-based nonprofit, was founded by John Harlow, a lawyer and venture capitalist who said he got the idea four years ago after hearing of a soldier with a \$7,000 phone bill.

The organization arranges videoconferences involving 200-300

babies per month, he said.

It provides another 2,000 videoconferences per month, enabling soldiers to participate in weddings, graduations and parent-teacher conferences, or to communicate with dying relatives, Harlow said.

Harlow is critical of commercial phone carriers for not offering lower rates to soldiers serving overseas. His organization has devised a less costly alternative that relies on the Internet, he said.

He noted that many soldiers have endured multiple deployments to Iraq, separating them from spouses and children for years. The close interaction enabled by a videoconference can hold a marriage or a family together, he said.

Freedom Calls doesn't charge soldiers and their families.

The videoconferences require a computer, webcam, free software provided by Freedom Calls and a broadband connection.

Providing the services costs Freedom Calls about \$1,000 a day, with most it spent on satellite service, Harlow said.

The organization exists on donations from corporations and the public, he said.

Amanda Wertz was expected to leave Holy Spirit today.

She'll have a videoconference set up at home, and Freedom Calls will connect her with her husband about three times a month, she said.

Wertz said she learned about Freedom Calls about a week before the birth.

"I can't even begin to explain how thankful I am," she said.

DAVID WENNER: 255-8172 or [dwenner@patriot-news.com](mailto:dwenner@patriot-news.com)

## **FREEDOM CALLS**

Information about Freedom Calls, including how to contribute, can be found on its Web site: [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org).



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Through the video hookup at right, Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Wertz, stationed in Iraq, sees and speaks to his wife Amanda and their newborn son, Bradley, and his mother Ruth Wertz, at left, Monday, at Holy Spirit Hospital.