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Video uplink joins couple for 20th anniversary

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The Mascolas celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary via a video uplink from Al Asad Air Base near Ramadi, Iraq, where Sgt. Mascola is serving with the 1st Battalion, 109th Mechanized Infantry. Mrs. Mascola's part in the long-distance reunion unfolded in a small classroom at the Pennsylvania State University Worthington Scranton campus.

She brought flowers for the occasion.

"It's very special to see him face to face," she said.

The two spoke for about an hour. Their son, Nicholas, who is a freshman at Penn State's main campus in State College, joined them later through another video connection.

At first, the couple struggled to talk. They hadn't seen one another since November, when Sgt. Mascola returned to their Milford home on leave. Members of the media left the room shortly after the teleconference began, to give the couple privacy.

The video conference was provided by Freedom Calls Foundation, a New York-based charity that has provided deployed soldiers with conference and satellite calls since April 2004.

The organization provides about 1,000 video conferences a month, with each "visit" lasting about 30 minutes, founder and executive director John Harlow II said. For special events, the talks can last an hour or more. This is the second video conference at Penn State Worthington Scranton.

"All the family things that we take for granted here at home can be done virtually now," Mr. Harlow said.

Sgt. Mascola joined the National Guard after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He had been in the Navy for six years and is fervently patriotic, Mrs. Mascola said with pride.

The two have been separated by war before, when he served as a peacekeeper in Bosnia in 2002.

Clutching her hands tightly, Mrs. Mascola said the unit's family support group has been a strong source of support, but she's ready for her husband to come home.



Jason Farmer / Staff Photographer

Army Staff Sgt. Greg Mascola, who is stationed at Al Asad Air Base in Iraq, speaks with his wife, Franny, by video conference at Penn State Worthington Scranton campus on Wednesday, their 20th wedding anniversary.

"I can't imagine how soldiers in Vietnam could only talk to their families every six months," said Sgt. Mascola, who is due home this summer. "We're lucky."

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