

TSouth CountyIMES

Technology Allows Marine In Iraq To Connect With Family

07/11/2008 - When Marine Staff Sgt. Daniel Stolarski saw his newborn son for the first time, he couldn't stop smiling.

"How about that!" he said, as his wife, Karen, held their baby boy, Daniel Michael Jr., for his daddy to see. "He's perfect!"

Born at 8:12 p.m., June 5, at St. Anthony's Medical Center, Daniel Michael Jr. measured 22 inches long and weighed 8 pounds 6 ounces.

The scene was unremarkable – two new parents marveling at the miracle they've created. Except, in this scene, mom and baby were in the Family Birth Center of St. Anthony's in South County; dad was at a Marine Corps base in Iraq.

The family was linked via video conference through the Internet and a satellite program built and run by the not-for-profit Freedom Calls Foundation. The organization, which relies solely on contributions from the public, arranges nearly 2,000 video conferences and more than a million minutes of phone calls from the front lines every month, free of charge.

Dan Stolarski heard about it from other Marines; and, knowing he wouldn't be home for the birth, he contacted them. With the help of some sophisticated technology set up at St. Anthony's, the visit was arranged for the day after the baby's birth.

Despite a long labor, followed by a Caesarean delivery, Karen Stolarski appeared animated as she watched her husband's face on the video screen. Meanwhile, he was watching her and little Daniel on a similar screen on the other side of the world.

"The nurses figured out how to connect us by phone during the delivery, and that was awesome; but being able to actually see him and have him see us was incredible," said the new mom.



Karen Stolarski shows off newborn son, Daniel Michael Jr., to his dad, a Marine who is stationed in Iraq (pictured on the video screen).