

## Motown charity brings troops and loved ones face-to-face

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For many soldiers, the toughest part about serving in Iraq or Afghanistan is the long separation from family. The Freedom Calls Foundation, a charity based in Morristown, provides free video- and phone calls for some 40,000 U.S. troops at five bases in Iraq. The nonprofit seeks funds to extend these expensive satellite services to U.S. forces in Afghanistan.



Officers from Picatinny Arsenal use Freedom Calls link to speak with soldiers at Camp Taji in Iraq, from Friday's Morris County Chamber of Commerce breakfast in Florham Park.

In this video, Lt. Col. John Stack, a special forces officer now stationed at Picatinny Arsenal, speaks from personal experience about how programs like Freedom Calls ease the minds of soldiers in harm's way. On Friday he addressed the Morris County Chamber of Commerce, which watched him video-conference with Capt. Rory Bradford and Staff Sgt. Angela Younger-Embree at Camp Taji, a few miles north of Baghdad.



Kathryn Hudacek and John Harlow II of the Freedom Calls Foundation, based in Morristown.

Started in 2003, Freedom Calls has used Internet and satellite technology to make soldiers feel at home in all sorts of ways.

Soldiers have gotten married and divorced, witnessed births, bade farewell to dying relatives, made court appearances and answered jury duty via these video links, according to Freedom Calls founder John Harlow II.

Freedom Calls even documented the giving and receiving ends of an in-vitro fertilization, John said.

The former venture capitalist created the charity after reading about a National Guard soldier from Rhode Island who got socked with a \$7,000 tab phoning home in 2003.

"The phone company wouldn't give him a break," John said. "I thought that was outrageous."

While the military provides some communications facilities to troops in Iraq, the demand is great and infrastructure is limited, John said.

Marci Keck works at Picatinny and can't wait for Freedom Calls to open centers in Afghanistan, where her husband Mark serves with the Security Task Force Coalition.

"Now, maybe there's a phone call every other week, or an occasional e-mail," said Marci.



John Harlow II, founder of the Freedom Calls Foundation.