

## Big Screen Links Marine to Family



Lance Cpl. Brad Myers, of New Port Richey, who is stationed in Iraq, speaks to his family via video conference at St. Petersburg College.

BRUCE HOSKING / Tribune

By ANGELA DELGADO [adelgado@tampatrib.com](mailto:adelgado@tampatrib.com)

Published: May 14, 2006

SEMINOLE - Larry O'Donnell arrived at St. Petersburg College's Seminole Campus with his family, expecting to hear his grandson Richard play clarinet in a concert.

Instead, he saw another grandson, Lance Cpl. Brad Myers Jr., via video conference Saturday morning. Myers, who lives in San Diego, has been stationed at Camp Al Asad in Iraq for three months. He spoke to his grandfather live from a giant screen, to O'Donnell's surprise.

"I was so amazed and overwhelmed," O'Donnell said.

Maria Myers, of Holiday, Brad Myers' mother and O'Donnell's daughter, organized the surprise. Her father had been seriously ill. Two weeks ago, she read about Operation Freedom Calls, which provides about 40,000 U.S. troops with the opportunity to communicate with families back home through video conferences, according to the organization's Web site.

The Myers family was the first to use the Operation Home Link at the Seminole Campus, the only provider of the service in the Tampa Bay area. Panama City and Orlando also offer Freedom Calls.

Myers and several friends and relatives along for the experience stood and clapped when Brad Myers appeared on screen.

"This is the best I've felt since I got sent here," said Myers, 21. "This is just amazing being able to see my family and be able to get through this. It's just crazy out here."

Myers, who has been a Marine for one year and is scheduled to return home in August, shared memories with family and friends, exchanged inside jokes and listened to Richard, 12, play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" on the clarinet.

Maria Myers said Richard chose that song because while Brad Myers was in boot camp, she told him that the brightest star in the sky was her shining down on him.

"I'm always looking for the star," Myers told his mom.

At one point, Maria Myers received her Mother's Day gift and card from her son.

"I'm glad that I'm your son, and I'll always be proud that you're my mom," Maria Myers read, her voice breaking.

After more than an hour of bonding, Myers had to sign off. But first, Provost Jim Olliver announced the college's President Carl M. Kuttler Jr. offered Myers an online course with the college.

"Stay pushing forward, as I am," Myers said before his image disappeared from the screen. His family and friends blew him kisses, and his mother wept.

"It was wonderful," she said. "It was like he was in the room with us. ... I haven't seen him in five months; I feel so much better talking to him all that time."

"I'm sure it helped our son's morale, too."

## **MAKE THE CALL**

To contact a service member through Operation Freedom Calls, call Michelle Hawk at (727) 394-6200 to make an appointment. For information, go to [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org).