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Dad's presence is son's best gift

BY JOE SYLVESTER STAFF WRITER
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DUNMORE — Sgt. David Carbo is busy guarding convoys in Iraq.

But he was able to take an hour off Saturday to attend his 3-year-old son's birthday party — in Dunmore.

Sgt. Carbo, 31, of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's 109th Infantry Alpha Company, Honesdale, made the party at Penn State Worthington Scranton Campus through a live video feed from northeast Iraq.

The not-for-profit Freedom Calls Foundation's satellite network made it possible for little Vinny Carbo, his mother and other family members, all from Beach Lake, to see and talk to Vinny's dad.

Right away, Sgt. Carbo spotted the birthday cake with three candles and football player design in the icing.

"Whose cake is that?" he joked. The cake was on a long table in a campus conference room, where Vinny and cousins Alana Danelski, 4, and her sister, Amanda, 2, wore crown party hats and waved American flags. Behind them, Vinny's mom, Marie, her parents, Alan Danelski Sr. and Ruthann Danelski, and Marie's brother, Alan Jr., and his wife, Colleen, looked on.

Mom then lit the candles and Dad joined with the others in singing "Happy Birthday" to his son, whose actual birthday was Jan. 7.

Vinny smiled after the song and softly told his dad, "I miss you, Daddy."

They blew each other kisses and exchanged "I love yous." Vinny showed his dad how he could play his toy electronic guitar. Then it was time for cake, which no computer or satellite could transmit over eight time zones.

Just being able to see the party and his family and talk to them made Sgt. Carbo feel closer to home, he said. The sergeant, a recruiter before going to Iraq last summer, was home over Thanksgiving, returning to the Middle East on Dec. 5. He's due home in June or July, according to Marie Carbo, 32.

"It felt good talking to him and seeing him," said Mrs. Carbo, who chats with her husband on their home computer each night.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, a New York-based public charity and not-for-profit, has built a satellite network to connect soldiers overseas with their families to talk or take part in family events, such as graduations and birthday parties. The organization is funded through corporate and private donations and has three videoconferencing sites in Iraq, but hopes to expand.

John B. Harlow II, co-founder and executive director of the foundation, said the local Penn State campus hosted the videoconference after a technical adviser at St. Francis University in western Pennsylvania, a network member, sent out mass e-mails seeking a site in the Scranton area.

Penn State was the first to respond.

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