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ANDREA HICKS Web site connects Galva, soldiers - National Guard unit goes off to war with laptops and a place to stay in touch GALVA - Look out one window of Jim Doherty's home, and you'll see the house where Lucas grew up. Look out another window, and there's Tommy's house. Nolan's is around the corner.

We might call them "our boys in uniform." For Doherty, they're boys from the neighborhood, and his own son, Chris, is one of them - members of the Galva-based Illinois National Guard's Battery F of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery currently stationed in Kuwait and soon to be deployed to Iraq as part of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division. One month ago, Doherty started a Web site with the "boys" in mind. The Galva unit included 122 men when it was ordered to active duty last October for the first time since the Korean War.

"A lot of kids from the neighborhood were going over there," he said. "I started it just as a way for the families to keep in touch."

To combat the fears of their families, friends and neighbors, Galva's soldiers have been armed with laptops and digital cameras.

"We don't know how they're going to connect yet, but we hope they'll be able to," Doherty said. Before Chris left, his parents gave him a digital camera that could fit inside an Altoids mints tin.

"We hope he gets connected, and he can start sending us pictures and stories and stuff like that," Doherty said.

The Doherty family has been dealing with their son's absence for several years. He is a lieutenant in the Army and was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas, after his artillery training in Oklahoma. What is new to them is the danger their son faces in Iraq and the increased difficulty in communicating.

"It's a little bit tougher to get to him now," said Chris' mother, Pam Doherty.

Jim Doherty said he was inspired by a Web site called "Army National Guard Moms," to which his site has a link. The Galva Armed Services Page, at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Galvaarmypage/>, also links to many other sites, including one set up by John Wallenfeldt, Tommy's brother.

"It's therapy," Doherty said. "I'd rather try to do something constructive with my time for the next year."

Wallenfeldt and Doherty have written to one another several times, but it's the bulletin board on Doherty's Web site that sees most of the interaction between family and friends of the soldiers.

Through the Web site, Wallenfeldt was able to relay a March 8 phone call from Tommy.

"He was able to stand in line and use a satellite phone, which was a truly horrible connection," Wallenfeldt said. "Plus, depending on the day, the queue for those lines is darn long. He said he'd try again before the end of the month, but not to hold my breath."

The page is set up as a Yahoo group and includes a bulletin board, chat room and an area for photos, not to mention lots of links. Doherty said he's been "pirating" information from news sources to make sure loved ones of the neighborhood kids, and other enlisted men and women, have a central source of information.

"I wanted a central place for everybody to be able to get this information," he said. "Not everybody surfs the Internet."

"It's just basically an online resource of anything I could find having to do with the Galva Guard or the 1st Cavalry Division," Doherty added. "We even have wedding pictures."

Many of the postings on the Web site now consist of wishes for safety.


In this one posted March 15 from "Amber," she sends Chris Doherty her best.

"I have been able to talk with Chris in the past about going to Iraq, and I know his feelings on it. Now here's mine: I pray for your safe return home to your wonderful wife, family and friends," she writes.

"I hope you know that you are loved dearly and missed badly by all who know you. I do not think that this war is in vain, and I know you would fight to protect your loved ones in any capacity."

A Web address - www.galvapatriot.com - is reserved as a future home page Chris will construct to make the site easier to use. To have full access to the site, users must choose a user name and password, but signing up is free. Doherty also has tried to make as much of the site accessible before users sign in as Yahoo will allow.

The Galva Lions Club is raising money to put two computers in the Galva Armory, where families without computer access can send e-mail and access the site.



"If we can help the other families with information and the guys over there if they need anything," Doherty said, "hopefully it's just a click away." Jim Doherty of Galva has established a Web site for family members to keep in touch with the 122 members of the Illinois National Guard's Battery F of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery based in Galva. The Galva unit, part of the Army's 1st Cavalry, is in Kuwait waiting to be sent to Iraq. The unit includes Doherty's son, Chris, pictured on the computer screen. CAPTION: Jim Doherty's son, Chris, center, is flanked by friends Tommy Wallenfeldt, left, and Lucas Siemers. The men grew up together in a Galva neighborhood and now are in Kuwait with the 1st Cavalry waiting to be sent to Iraq. Jim Doherty established a Web site to help Galva residents keep in touch with their loved ones. Many of the soldiers were sent overseas with laptops and tiny digital cameras. CAPTION: Galva Armed Services Page -- <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Galvaarmypage/>

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