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Signs point to a warm welcome Saturday in Galva

March 17, 2005

Our View

Letters

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Copley News Service

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Stocks

GALVA - The decorations are out. The invitations have been sent. The hosts and hostesses are ready.

All that's missing are the guests. But that'll soon change.

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The Galva National Guard unit's coming home.

"We will be home on Saturday ... I am expecting arrival in Galva at 1:30 p.m.," Maj. Mike Kessel said Tuesday night.

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For some, it's not a moment too soon.

"I can hardly sleep. I'm too anxious," conceded Heather Wineinger of Galva, whose husband, Jon, is in the unit.

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She's not alone. Saturday's arrival will bring what Galva soldiers and families have longed for since the Galva unit was deployed in November 2004: Togetherness again.

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In Wineinger's case, it'll be a re-uniting of newlyweds. She and her husband have been married just 19 months - the last 14 with Jon deployed.

"I've missed him so much," said Wineinger, "I'm going to be glad he's home."

Signs posted around Galva express similar sentiments.

"5 Days 'til Dad's home" a sign at Kelly Thomson's house declared Tuesday. Thomson and her children await their husband and father, Noland Thomson.

Family and friends of the Galva Guardsmen have been especially excited about the unit's return since Sunday, when the soldiers hit U.S. soil. Their flight from Kuwait, followed

by a stop in Maryland, landed the troops at Fort Sill, Okla., early Sunday morning.

They knew it was just a matter of time before an arrival date would be set. Kessel's announcement Tuesday night brought glee to many.

"We're overwhelmed," added Ron Werkheiser of Galva, father of Guardsman Eric Werkheiser.

"Hoohah!" added the father of another Guardsman by e-mail.

Ruth Bollman of Galva doesn't have any family or friends returning from war. But she's still excited.

"I am really excited about it, because I had a boy in the '91 Gulf War, and I'm just thankful he's not in this war," Bollman said of her son Charles.

To celebrate the occasion, Bollman's cutting up an old yellow tablecloth. She'll use it to make yellow ribbons to place on a bush at her 303 S. Center Ave. home.

Others may need to follow her lead.

"We're out of yellow ribbons," said Janet Lawson, manager of Dollar General in Galva, Tuesday morning. In fact, Lawson said her store's sold a lot of other decorations, including poster board and markers in anticipation of the Guard's return.

At the Galva armory Tuesday, Jeff Mertens of the local Family Readiness Group placed several welcome-home signs inside the heavily decorated building.

"It's all I've been doing," smiled Mertens.

The armory's where the troops will line up one final time Saturday before going home. The Family Readiness Group's making sure the armory's spit-polished for the scene.

Mertens also said more ribbons and bows will be hung along Galva streets. Family Readiness Group members plan to paint the town red, white and blue - and quite a bit of yellow.

Rick Calhoun's showing his own signs of gratitude. Calhoun, owner of Dad's Pizza in Galva, is giving each soldier a free pizza. That's about 130 gift certificates - a pricey thank you for some. But Calhoun shrugs it off.

"It just seems like the thing to do," said Calhoun, a Vietnam

veteran. "I haven't given nearly what they've given. No one's shot at me."

Besides, Calhoun reasoned, "They probably haven't had a good pizza in quite awhile."

While Saturday's homecoming is expected to be emotional, it's not likely to last long. Galva Mayor Don Hagaman said that's been the experience elsewhere.

"For one of the groups, the in-and-out was about 28 minutes," Hagaman said.

A longer ceremony is expected in 90 days, when the Guard returns to Galva again for regular drilling. Those are the wishes of National Guard officials elsewhere.

Hagaman said Galva Police will escort the troops into town. It's not clear from which direction they'll enter the city. Early reports said the troops' buses would enter from U.S. 34 East, with the police meeting the buses at Black Hawk East College.

"We're getting a lot of calls about people wanting to be in the procession, but really, the armory is kind of discouraging it, for two reasons," Hagaman said.

"One, the buses are going to go through traffic signs as they want to. People following won't have that privilege and if they fall behind and want to catch up, they won't be able to.

"The other thing is if they want to see the troops come in at the armory, (followers) won't be there in time."

Either way, it's likely the buses will travel north down Northwest Third Avenue to reach the armory. The public is expected to line along that street - and other places - to show their support.

Only family members and the media will be allowed inside the armory for the troops' final formation, Hagaman said. To handle the heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic, the road in front of the armory - Morgan Road - will be closed from North Center Avenue to Northwest Third Avenue, Hagaman said. The armory parking lot will be open only to soldiers' families.

Doug Boock is editor

of The Galva News.