

[News](#)[Sports](#)[Opinion](#)[Business](#)[Lifestyles](#)[Classifieds](#)[Search](#)**News**

Births, Deaths,
Local,
Lottery

Sports

Scoreboard

Our View

Letters

Business

Stocks

Lifestyles

Celebrations,
Features

Classifieds

Auto,
Help Wanted,
Real Estate

About Us

Copley Papers,
Directory,
Subscriptions

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Monmouth military mom sees Stars

Blue Star Mothers offer their support

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By **CAROL CLARK**

of The Register-Mail

MONMOUTH - Megan Grant's wait is nearly over. Her son Eric Werkheiser, Galva, is expected to return from Iraq with the Illinois National Guard from Galva in mid- to-late March.

Eric also is the son of Ron and Vicky Werkheiser, Galva.

But, like all parents and grandparents who have children and grandchildren stationed in Iraq, she has wanted to know what was going on. She spent hours surfing the Internet and one day found the Blue Star Mothers of America, a national organization that provides support for active service personnel, promotes patriotism, assists veterans organizations and is available to assist in homeland volunteer efforts.

She is the only member from this part of the state.

Then, just a few short months later the Blue Star Mothers of America asked for her help. Blue Star Mothers wanted Grant to present the mother of Sgt. Jessica M. Housby, Milan, with a Gold Star Flag for the loss of her daughter in Iraq. Housby was a member of the 1644th Transportation Unit, Illinois National Guard, Rockford.

Grant contacted Housby's mother, who asked that the Gold Star Flag be presented to her at the graveside service. Grant also presented two poems to Housby's mother.

"I met the mother the day of the funeral," Grant said. "I stood with Msgr. Dale Wellman and Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn during the service. The whole service was very comforting for me."

With tears in her eyes, Grant recounted the graveside service with the grieving family, containing the fears she and thousands of other families with children in Iraq face each

day.

"I don't know what affected me the most - the fact that this lady had lost her daughter or my own fears. But, it was an honor for me to be the voice of all military moms," she said.

One of the privileges of being a Blue Star Mom is that Grant will be able to sponsor her mother, Donna Libby, when her son Jeff - Megan's brother - leaves for Iraq in November. Jeff Libby is a staff sergeant. with the Texas Army National Guard.

Mothers, grandmothers and stepmothers who raised a child before age 13 are eligible to join Blue Star Mothers. Five members are needed to form a local chapter, Grant said. Anyone interested should contact Grant at (309) 734-3292. The membership fee is \$10. Half stays with the local organization and the remainder goes to the national chapter. A Blue Star Walk is being planned for this fall in Washington, D.C. Until a local group is formed, Grant is working with organization officials in California.

Blue Star Mothers also help families with postage, telephone cards, and supplies for the troops and serve as a place to vent feelings and help with baby-sitting.

Grant said she will have some respite between the time her son gets home from Iraq and the time her brother leaves, albeit a short period.

Contact Carol Clark at (309) 734-4721, or cclark@register-mail.com.

Turned to Gold

I think the saddest day

That someone ever told

When someone tells a mother

That her blue star turned to gold.

Her head goes up so proudly

While her heart within her dies

She may be choked with sorrow

But she never cries.

She has waited for days on end

For the war to pass
When she could see her daughter (son) again
And hold her (him) close at last
Now, the new has come
In words so bleak and cold
Which tells what she fears
Her blue star has turned to gold