

Hometown shows love for its soldiers

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They are a fresh reminder that the Sauk Valley is contributing some of its most precious gifts — its sons and daughters — to the war in Iraq.

Some 40 volunteers gathered Saturday morning in Dixon to replace the yellow ribbons along Galena Avenue with new bows made of bright yellow, and red, white and blue. A light breeze caught the streamers of the new ribbons as they were tied to lightposts along the county seat's main thoroughfare.

The volunteers included members of Operation Support, the Rock River chapter of VietNow and the F/202 ADA Family Readiness Group, as well as parents of local soldiers in other units and residents who simply wanted to show their support for the Sauk Valley's soldiers.

"This is good," said Mike Bowman of Polo as his wife, Kim, stood nearby helping make up ribbons. "We really haven't seen much from the community. Up to now, it's mostly just been the military families. It's nice to see people getting involved."

The Bowmans' son Tim is deployed in Iraq with F/202 ADA, the combined unit from National Guard units in Dixon, Galva and Kewanee. Thirty-five soldiers from the Dixon unit are deployed with F/202 ADA.

"He's with a good group of guys," Mike Bowman said. "They watch out for each other."

Pam Squires of Sterling was busy making ribbons as groups came in, got new supplies of ribbons and went back out. Larger ribbons were created and placed on the Dixon arch. One of the volunteers suggested wrapping the new Lee County Courts addition in a giant yellow ribbon.



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Squires agreed that the support from the local community is picking up.

"The longer they've been deployed, the more, I think, people are getting involved," she said. Her son Justin is with the Dixon unit.

The Bowmans and Squires are active members of the F/202 ADA Family Readiness Group. Members of the group support each other in ways large and small. The support reaches across different branches of the service too and extends to families with soldiers in other units, such as the 1644th Transportation Unit in Rock Falls, which is now deployed in the

Middle East.

That support was evident as some of the others talked about a local mother whose son is a Marine in Iraq.

"She said he called and told her 'Mom, I'm not going to be able to call you for a couple of weeks,'" one of the volunteers, herself the mother of a soldier, said.

"We hold up. We hold each other up," said Marcia Wooden of Polo, whose son, Paul Lilley, is a member of the Dixon unit. "We just heard that her son is with the Marines there, so now we'll help hold her up too."

"This is nothing compared to what they're doing over there," Wooden said. "This is just a little way we can show our guys we care. We're very proud of him and all the guys with him."

The talk of the day was not the impending assault on Fallujah but of Christmas — items to be shipped in Christmas boxes that the families and Operation Support volunteers will pack on Tuesday. One mother talked about trying to find a record player for her soldier son who has asked for one for Christmas. Members of Operation Support talked about the best way to pack different items in the Christmas boxes. There was also hopeful talk about the promise of the Dixon soldiers' homecoming — scheduled for March but subject to change at any time.

"Thanks buddy, thanks for coming out and helping," one of the F/202 fathers said to one of the VietNow members as they shook hands. "You know what this is all about."

"Yep," the Vietnam veteran said. "Been there, done that."

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