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## Annawan sign honors Iraq soldiers

*By Star Courier staff*

ANNAWAN -- Annawan is second to none when it comes to backing their kids. Many communities post signs along the streets and in their yards when the football or basketball teams start winning.

In Annawan, "Go Braves!" and "Braves Country" signs start popping up in September and stay up whether the team wins or loses.

Therefore, it's no surprise that a long, white sign with red, white and blue bunting on both ends bearing the names of 11 "Hometown Heroes" serving in Iraq in four-inch letters, has been attached to a fence along Route 78, just north of Route 6.

Although some have since moved from the community, all 11 graduated in recent years from Annawan High School. All are serving near Baghdad with Battery F, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, Illinois National Guard, from Galva.

The sign was built by John and Jacki Boelens, parents of SPC Justin Boelens, and Dave and Sherri DeSplinter, parents of Lt. John DeSplinter, a Navy F-18 fighter pilot who flew bombing missions off the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt during the initial invasion of Iraq in March of 2003.

Lt. DeSplinter's grandparents, Art and Irene Boelens, of Annawan, planted red, white and blue petunias along the length of the sign.

Annawan 11 "Hometown Heroes" in Battery F include SPC Kevin Neuleib, SPC Mark Bomleny, SPC Charlie Harker; SPC Justin Boelens; SPC Ryan Carlson; PFC

Dusty Hill; SGT Bruce Hartman; SGT Eric Hayes;  
Sgt. Joe Hardin; SGT Randy VanDeGenachte; and LT  
Tracy Doubler.

Room has been left for additional names.

Annawan students have been sending care packages to  
the group on a regular basis since late march when the  
unit arrived in Iraq.

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