

Community to welcome Marine reservists back from Iraq

By TERRY BROWN, Special to the Times Union
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A veteran has launched a military operation of sorts in the Capital Region — a welcome-home celebration for Marine reservists returning from the Iraq war. For the past month, Jim Friello of Niskayuna, a Marine veteran, has spearheaded plans for a Fox Company Homecoming parade and celebration at 11 a.m. Sunday, April 19, on Freemans Bridge Road.

Friello, his neighbor Marine Staff Sgt. Mary Castilla and others have recruited scores of veterans groups, military leaders of other services, fire and police departments, politicians, bands and entertainers.

He is urging community members to come out and share their support for the 125 Marines of the 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment of the 4th Marine Division, who have completed a seven-month tour in the combat zone.

"Let us show the Fox Company Marines that they are our true hometown heroes by giving them a welcome-home celebration like the Marines have never seen before," Friello urges.

For some of the Marine reservists, this was their third deployment, according to Castilla. "I think it's time we recognize the sacrifices and commitment these troops have given to our country and community," she says.

While the reservists were deployed in Iraq, the unit moved from Albany to a new reserve center in Glenville.

"Not only is this an opportunity to welcome our troops home but also welcome them to our community as our new neighbors," says Friello, who volunteered his Holly Marine marina to be used by the Marines and their families for their celebration.

After he learned from Castilla, who is a Marine assigned to F Company, the unit was due back from Iraq, he suggested to her the community hold a celebration. He added the Marines could hold the celebration at his marina and has been extra busy since coordinating the event.

The Schenectady Pipe and Drum Corps, Troy Police Band, USO Liberty Musical Show Troupe and several other bands will entertain. Also, activities are planned for the Marines' children.

For information, call Friello at 428-6565.

Soldier returns from Iraq

Jamie McNally of Greenwich was promoted to Army specialist four just before he redeployed to Fort Hood, Texas, after a 12-month tour in the Rustimiyah area of Iraq.

McNally, son of Lisa Verdon and stepson of Derrick Verdon of Greenwich, received an Army Commendation Medal for his performance as an infantryman with the 66th Armored Battalion of 4th Infantry Division in Iraq.

MPs to deploy to Iraq

One hundred and eighty soldiers from the state Army National Guard's 206th Military Police Company based in Latham are undergoing three weeks of pre-mobilization training at Fort Dix, N.J., in preparation for possible mobilization and deployment for Operation Iraqi Freedom later this spring.

The 206th Military Police Company includes approximately 120 Citizen Soldiers from Capital Region communities.

The 206th Military Police Company is expected to mobilize for federal duty in June and will serve one year of active duty, according to Eric Durr, a state Division of Military and Naval Affairs spokesman.

Recognition for support

Tully Rinckey PLLC law firm of Colonie has received recognition from the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve for his outstanding commitment to employees who serve in the National Guard and reserves.

The ESGR Statement of Support certification is issued to employers who effectively manage Guard and Reserve employees and seek to increase awareness of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

USERRA protects individuals who leave their civilian employment positions to perform military responsibilities. The law requires employers to preserve the seniority, promotion, health care, pension and other employment benefits of citizen soldiers when they return to the jobs they left to serve the country.

"This certification means a great deal to me personally. I've dedicated my legal career to protecting and furthering the employment rights of military personnel," said Mathew

Tully, a Guard major and an Iraq war veteran, and founding partner of Tully Rinckey PLLC.

"As a member of the National Guard myself, I recognize just how important these rights are to our armed forces."

News of your soldiers and units can be sent to Duty Calls, Terry Brown, Times Union, Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212 or by e-mail at brownt@timesunion.com.