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## Attention Newsroom—Press Release

December 23, 2004  
For Immediate Release

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### **Warm Christmas for family of soldier deployed to Iraq Early Christmas, Welcome Home part of department's new mission**

(MADISON) -- For Sarah Roth, 22, of New Richmond, Wis., Christmas came a little early this year.

Already financially strained, when the furnace in the Roths' small mobile home failed earlier this week—perhaps due to the additional strain of the current icy blast of bitterly cold temperatures and sub-zero wind chills—the young mother of two wasn't quite sure where to turn.

With her husband, PFC Andrew Roth, also 22, currently deployed to Iraq with the Army National Guard's B Company, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, Sarah's challenges seemed even greater than the daily difficulties of caring alone for their two small children, Alexandra, age 2, and Dorothea, age 6 weeks.

Called to active duty in June, Andrew was sent to Mississippi along with his unit for six months of pre-deployment training. After a short two-week visit home in November for the birth of their second daughter, PFC Roth was sent to Iraq along with his unit just days before Thanksgiving.

"He was able to be with our new baby for just five days before he had to go," said Sarah.

While she didn't want to worry Andrew about their troubles, in a phone call a few days ago, Sarah did tell him about their immediate need for the new furnace, which would cost \$900 that they just didn't have on his meager private's salary.

Unable to do much more than be supportive at such a distance, he tried to point her in the right direction. "I'll be praying for you," he also reassured her.

"So, I called the local family support group," said Sarah, "and they were able to give me about fifty numbers."

"I just kept calling every one of them," she said.

"Everyone that I spoke to was so nice," she said, "but most of them just gave me more numbers to try."

More numbers, that is, until she was connected with Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Specialist Gundel Metz.

"Gundy," as she is fondly known by her coworkers and fellow veterans, is herself a retired 20-year Army veteran. She immediately set to work to assist the family.

"Gundy told me that she would call me back, and within an hour she called me and told me that she had already been able to pull together \$500," said Sarah.

(more)

Gundy, who has been with the department for almost four years, said, "I'm an old NCO," [Non-Commissioned Officer], "and that's what NCOs do - take care of the troops and their families," she said.

As part of a new WDVA initiative called "Mission: Welcome Home," Gundy and other department staff find themselves receiving more calls from veterans and family members in need. She and her colleagues are quickly becoming skilled in drawing on an array of resources from around the state to provide a one-stop shop solution for those in need.

At Gundy's request, the Salvation Army in Somerset contributed \$150, the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post, VFW Post 10818 of New Richmond, contributed \$200. VFW Post 1318 of Madison contributed \$150, and the American Legion Department of Wisconsin's Project Cares program donated the remaining \$400 for the furnace.

VFW Auxiliary 10818 of New Richmond also contributed an additional \$50 to assist the family with food.

"Part of my vision for 'Mission: Welcome Home' is about ensuring that the array of resources available to our veterans and their families are available through a single point of contact," said WDVA Secretary John A. Scocos.

"So many organizations, like the American Legion and VFW in this case, truly want to help, but getting them connected with veterans and their families in need in a coordinated way has been desperately needed," said Scocos.

Scocos launched the department's Mission earlier in the Fall as a call to action to statewide veterans groups, service organizations, and local communities to provide assistance to new veterans and their families.

"I'm so glad that Sarah made that call to us. From there, in just a short time we were able to make sure that she was assisted by lashing together the resources from several different groups and programs," said Scocos.

"Instead of worrying about his family back home, this soldier can again remain fully focused on his critically important mission in Iraq," said Scocos. "That's what this mission is all about," he said.

Christmas at home while her husband is on duty in Iraq will still be challenging for Sarah and their young family, and the tens of thousands of families just like theirs. While they can't be sure when he's scheduled to return, Sarah believes that Andrew is slated for a one-year rotation, with almost eleven months remaining. But at least now, thanks to the assistance of a statewide mission of caring, she and their young family will be warm this holiday season.

More information about "Mission: Welcome Home" is available on the department's website, at [www.dva.state.wi.us](http://www.dva.state.wi.us). Veterans and their family members can contact the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs for needed assistance toll-free at 1-800-WIS-VETS (800-947-8387).

Individuals in need of heat assistance, including veterans, may also contact the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program, at toll-free 1-866-HEAT-WIS (432-8947).