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Package drive honors soldier who died in Iraq

By Charlie Breitrose/ Daily News Staff
Thursday, October 12, 2006

SOUTHBOROUGH -- The town Saturday will honor a fallen Marine who put himself in harm's way to fulfill a promise to the family of one of his compatriots.

A ceremony will be held at 9 a.m. for Sgt. Matthew Fenton at the Woodward School, 28 Cordaville Road, as part of the care package drive for troops stationed overseas.

Fenton, who grew up in Little Ferry, N.J., was stationed at Fort Devens for a year before deploying to Iraq. He was one of hundreds of service men and women to get care packages from the drive organized by Southborough resident Lisa Braccia.

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"He was stationed here for about a year, and when his unit shipped out he volunteered to go," Braccia said.

On April 29, while patrolling in a Humvee, Fenton was injured when the vehicle was hit by a suicide bomber, Braccia said. He was sent home and died May 6, at age 24.

Braccia said Fenton put himself in harm's way.

"The amazing thing about this young man, a mother (of another Marine) called me and he promised this young man's sister he would protect her brother," Braccia said. "He was supposed to be in the Humvee and (Fenton) found him another job."

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The timing of his death also struck Braccia.

"We had a care package drive in May, and he died the day we shipped him a box," Braccia said. "I found out he passed, found it on the computer. The following day I got a message from his unit."

Since Fenton's death, Braccia has been in touch with Fenton's mother.

"I had sent a letter to Sgt. Fenton's family expressing condolences," Braccia said. "I asked if we could do the drive in his honor and they were pleased. I check in with his mother every week. It is so raw for her, he was only there six weeks."

Fenton's mother, Diane, his sister, Courtney, and one of his cousins and his wife will be at the ceremony. The event will be quite short, Braccia said, but will include two color guards -- one from Fort Devens and one from the Marine Corps League -- and the End Zone Militia from the New England Patriots.

The end of the ceremony will be marked with a flyover of World War II-era planes.

Items for the care packages can be dropped off at Southborough Senior Center, 9 Cordaville Road, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 14 and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 15. Also, items can be taken to the Stop & Shop on Lyman Street in Westborough from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday or on Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Items requested from troops include any snack foods, toiletry items, microwaveable meals and DVDs, Braccia said. Other items can be found on www.anysoldier.com. The most appreciated items, however, are letters.

"Cards and letters from people, that is the most important thing," Braccia said. "The Walsh Middle School in Framingham has done some letters. I think think it's awesome, I'm thrilled. (The troops) just love it."

(Charlie Breitrose can be reached at 508-490-7461 or cbreitro@cnc.com.)

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