

NEW SOFTWARE TOOL HELPS MARINES “COLLABORATE” WITH FAMILIES BACK HOME

(PHOENIX, AZ - 6 August 2004) Although American GI's may be far from home, they can still feel close to their families. Now a squadron of Marines on assignment in Iraq can communicate with their families as the result of a volunteer partnership between an IT solutions company, an Intel employee, and a collaboration software company.

The project came about when Intel employee Tony Kasovich volunteered his off hours to custom program a secure, password-protected website for a friend's Marine squadron scheduled for deployment to Iraq. Ensynch, an IT Solutions company headquartered in Arizona, offered free hosting for the site, and introduced Tony to GroveSite, a user-friendly collaboration software tool that would erase the need for custom html programming and would make the secure site available in hours rather than months.

The resulting HMH466 Wolfpack site changes every day as spouses and parents post messages, words of support and photos from the homefront. On the other side of the world, it's worth the time and effort to stand in line for Internet access, as the Marines in Iraq must. The Commanding Officer, LtCol. Mark Jebens, uses the webpage called "CO Corner" to communicate to the families, usually boasting about the excellence and dedication of the Marines and how their families can be proud of them. A "Homefront " page - managed by spouses (including that of the CO) - has information for the families based in the San Diego area about upcoming activities or how to get pay questions answered. The "Message Board" gets a workout everyday, as Marines and their family members post questions, comments, and words of encouragement. The spouses reply to each other with help finding physicians and congratulations on new births. "This is an awesome way to stay connected with each other and with our Marines," says Diane Jebens, the CO's wife and a HMH466 Key Volunteer. "Are we just really lucky to have this website? Every unit should be doing this," says another spouse.

The site also boasts ever-changing photos, including squadron photos (posted as thumbnails) of the Marines on the job in Iraq. "As I viewed the pictures, I found my son! What a relief to see him! It makes the deployment more bearable," says one parent. Most beloved are the Wolfpup photos - pictures, announcements and height and weight statistics for new babies born while the Marines are overseas. Some Marine dads are seeing their new babies for the first time via GroveSite.

"When I first viewed the Message Board all I could say was WOW! Lots of communication and questions. The site has given Marines and their families the ability to remain in touch over an extremely long distance and through trying times," states LtCol. Jebens.

During a military deployment, many families stay in the local area, but others return to live temporarily with parents or family. For instance, one Wolfpack Officer's spouse returned home to her family in Brazil. Supporting these often-dispersed families is the job of the squadron's Key Volunteer network; as part of the Marine Corps family readiness program, volunteer spouses undergo training and become key command representatives to facilitate the passing of official information to the families of deployed personnel. Typically, most information is passed via telephone calling trees – still, many activities which strengthen the unity and cohesiveness of the spouses are not available to the spouses who depart the immediate area.

"What has been fantastic about this website and the degree of autonomy and control which gives us the ability to personalize it so easily, is that remote located families, such as the spouse in Brazil, are brought back 'into the local area' via networking...the end result is that the spouse continues to receive the mutual support from the other spouses through the web postings and photographs not only from the family activities, but also from their forward deployed Marines. Seeing their Marine smiling and with friends on a regular basis, alleviates concerns back home for their Marine's safety and welfare. This allows the spouse and family to more readily continue on with their normal day-to-day activities...which has the end result of 'speeding the deployment along,'" Jebens continued. "I've heard more than one spouse comment, 'they just can't believe on how quickly this deployment has gone by.'...in fact, this deployment is one month longer than our 'normal' 6 month deployments."

As the deployment continued, Lt Col. Jebens noted other benefits. "The site's 'user control' enables me to immediately respond to family concerns, questions and most importantly address and correct any mis-information or

rumors that routinely inject themselves during lengthy deployments and cause families unnecessary concern or consternation back home, "says LtCol Jebens. "Essentially, I've been able to put out small fires immediately before they become raging infernos that can build suspicion and mistrust between the command and Marine families."

"Partnering with Ensynch and GroveSite has been great for the team of Marines and volunteers," adds Tony Kasovich, the volunteer who started it all. "I was able to quickly create the site, and the GroveSite software allowed Marines and volunteers alike to become productive within an hour, managing both content and users.

About GroveSite

GroveSite offers simplified external collaboration tools that provide an easy, fast and affordable way for organizations of all sizes to share information through a hosted application across the Internet. GroveSite was founded in 2002 and is headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, with offices in the Boston area. For more information, please contact Jane Hagen at GroveSite at 866-952-9880 and visit www.grovesite.com.