



Friday, August 08, 2008

## **Wounded troops celebrated in Locust Grove** ***Battalion donates bounty to children's charity***

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Some of the 54 wounded troops were moved to near-tears as they received an outpouring of support from members of the Henry County community early Wednesday morning.

More than 600 Locust Grove Elementary School students and teachers lined the streets as Henry County Police escorted the Fort Benning-Columbus, Ga., Wounded Troop Battalion through the small town of Locust Grove.

"We asked all the children and teachers to dress in red, white, and blue," said Christi Peterman, the school's principal.

The troops were not informed of the patriotic welcome before hand. Several of them got off the bus and out of the vehicles they were traveling in to greet the children.

"When we got to meet the men and women, we told them how much we appreciated them," Peterman said. "The troops - you can tell how much it really meant to them."

"It was very meaningful to me," said Peterman, whose son recently served two tours in Iraq as a U.S. Marine. "The kids loved it," she added. "It was powerful, and it's something that the children will never forget."

Several Locust Grove citizens took part in the patriotic celebration as well. The nation's flag was hung from a Henry County Fire Department ladder truck, which extended high above the town's Main Street as the caravan of wounded troops passed under.

"It was just a great event," said Linda Hutchison, Locust Grove's downtown development coordinator. "We welcomed them with flags and posters, and showed them how much we appreciate what they did."

The Locust Grove Mayor's Office issued a proclamation on behalf of the battalion, which made the trip through Locust Grove to deliver donations to the Noah's Ark Children's Care Home.

"The reason that they came was to bring donations to Noah's Ark," said Diane Smith, the assistant to Noah's Ark director, Jama Hedgecoth. "They filled our hallway with donations [a moving truck-load of toys, bedding, food, toiletries and clothes]. It was amazing."

The battalion was also honored during a ceremony attended by State Sen. John Douglas (R-Social Circle), Locust Grove Mayor Lorene Lindsey, Henry County Board of Commissioners Chairman Jason Harper, members of the Glen Haven Baptist Church, and many others.

"[The troops]said they had not received the kind of welcome that our community gave them anywhere else," Smith said. "They were very, very touched by it."

The troops were also given the opportunity to tour the Noah's Ark Animal Rehabilitation Center.

"They were pretty amazed with Noah's Ark," Smith said. "And we were overwhelmed with what they did for us."

Added Harper: "They were thinking they were going to be the givers," he said. "The most moving thing is the students were allowed to celebrate. It really was a moment."

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