

182nd Company and families grand marshals of Royale Parade

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Many of the soldiers in the 182nd Transportation Company are from northern Michigan.

To celebrate the homecoming of nearly 100 soldiers from Iraq in the last few months, the Traverse City-based Army reserve unit will serve as grand marshal of the DTE Energy Cherry Royale Parade during the National Cherry Festival on Saturday, July 9.

"It's really a function of educating the public on what this unit did in Iraq, and acknowledging those very brave and courageous men and women who have returned," Cherry Festival executive director Tom Kern said.

The parade is sponsored by DTE Energy, and the selection of the unit as grand marshal was a joint decision between the energy company and the festival, Kern said.

"They were very high targets and were under constant attack," he said. "I hope (spectators) take away a sense of pride and honor for the willingness of these people, regardless of

what people's feelings are about the war."

Two of the unit's members will carry a banner and lead the parade. A Humvee will carry injured soldiers, and about 25 members of the unit will march with a similar transport vehicle to the one used in Iraq.

The unit is responsible for hauling fuel and other materials soldiers might need, 1st Sgt. James Liberty said.

It was mobilized in March 2003, and spent three months at a base in Wisconsin before being notified its mission was canceled, said Liberty, who also is serving as the unit's commander.

About eight months later, nearly 100 soldiers were sent over to Iraq to serve with different units, he said, adding that most returned in the last two to four months.

About 35 soldiers are still overseas, he said. Liberty himself has not gone to Iraq.

For almost a year, Sgt. Dale Feigel served as a heavy equipment mechanic with a fuel-hauling unit in Iraq. Feigel, who received a Purple



R-E file photo/John L. Russell

Heart in combat, said his main base was 40 miles north of Baghdad.

"There's a big positive for what we're going over for," he said. "The wealth of their country has the potential for the whole world to prosper from. That's why they want change. They've been wanting change for a long time."

Feigel said it's hard to leave family and miss important events, but the reason why he's serving keeps him going.

"If it happened to be in Iraq or it happened to be somewhere else, I would put my life on the line for the freedom of these people," Feigel said.

Acting as grand marshal for the Cherry Royale Parade could boost

morale for the unit and the military in general, he said.

The Traverse City-area community has been supportive of the soldiers throughout the conflict, Feigel said. "That's a great honor," he said. "We need to keep that support going. Bottom line."

Nancy Jo Feigel, Dale Feigel's sister-in-law, has seen several family members serve in the military. Her father was in the Air Force, her brother served in the Army and her husband also was in the Air Force.

During the time Dale Feigel was in Iraq, Nancy Jo Feigel said he would call her when something bad happened to let her know he was all right, and also to tell her what she would see on the news.

"I come from a military family," Nancy Jo Feigel said. "Unless you've been in the military or have been associated with the military, people just don't realize the sacrifices that these men have to make."

The unit being named grand marshal of the Cherry Royale Parade is a "pretty big thing," she said.

"It really shows that the communi-

ty stands by their men, and it's nice that a community will do that," Nancy Jo Feigel said.

There will be at least 50 members of the Traverse City unit in the parade, but that number could rise to 80 if members from a Bay City detachment participate, Sgt. Jamie Taylor said.

"There have been times in the past where we couldn't participate," Taylor said. "It means a lot to the unit."

Community members pulled together to donate items for care packages that were sent to soldiers overseas, said Sgt. 1st Class John Dockery, currently on active duty but serving a special assignment at the 182nd unit.

Being asked to serve as grand marshal of the parade is another display of community outreach, Dockery said.

"It shows the soldiers that the community supports them," he said. "Even though we know some don't support the war, they still support the soldiers."

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