

CEO creates fund for children of fallen soldiers

Local News

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By THOMAS SCHULTZ
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER



A Santa Barbara CEO on Thursday launched a private nonprofit organization to raise cash for the children of U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq.

Dan O'Dowd, of Green Hills Software Inc., pledged \$100,000 of his own money to kick-start the locally based Fallen Heroes Last Wish Foundation. Flanked mid-day by a dozen employees and their children in the Cabrillo Boulevard lobby of the Veterans Memorial Building, Mr. O'Dowd added he will pay its operating expenses and match every dollar contributed by corporations or individuals until \$500,000 is collected.

"The war in Iraq is winding down," he said. "Soon the story is going to be off the front pages."

But the pain of losing a parent or spouse will linger. And new financial struggles among those affected will rival the emotional adjustments, Mr. O'Dowd said.

"A lot of people forget that the funeral isn't the end of the war for the families."

As their lives slip away, mortally wounded soldiers in the battlefield do not necessarily want a medal or parade, Mr. O'Dowd said. "Gratitude doesn't put food on the table. They'd say, 'Take care of my family.' "

The American death toll in Iraq climbed to at least 105 Thursday, according to the Pentagon. Mr. O'Dowd estimated the number of children affected at 100, though Lt. Col. Cynthia Colin, a Defense Department spokeswoman, said the exact number was unavailable.

His enthusiasm for Fallen Heroes, which he conceived of a week ago while watching television reports about military families, was evident. Mr. O'Dowd expressed a desire to eventually grow the foundation, city by city, through corporate contacts. He wondered if the organization might raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for each child.

He said any funds collected -- money to be awarded, at least initially, as cash grants -- might someday be used for college or the purchase of a home.

Mr. O'Dowd described government benefits that military families receive when a relative is killed in combat as "really inadequate to support a family."

More than 50 percent of active duty U.S. soldiers are married, and each family has on average two children, according to Fallen Heroes.

A widowed spouse receives \$900 a month, and \$200 more per child. Additional -- but elective -- death benefits amount to \$250,000.

Green Hills Software creates high performance compilers, software development tools and real-time operating systems for developers of so-called "embedded systems," a technology that includes automobile engine controllers, digital cameras and cellular phones.

For more information about Fallen Heroes, call 962-7843.