

3 children, 1 son-in-law are serving

VFW honors mother of active soldiers

BY STEPHANIE BARNARD

Eagle correspondent

It was only recently that Kim Whitson realized just how much she was watching her front door, dreading the day a man in uniform might come by to deliver bad news.

"You gave them life. And you're scared all the time," she said.

Three of Whitson's four children — plus a son-in-law — are in the military: Pfc. Douglas Taylor in the Army, Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Tommy Cardaropoli in the Navy and Airman 1st Class Shellie Vincent in the Air Force. Vincent's husband, John Vincent, is also in the Air Force, currently on his third tour of Afghanistan.

Cardaropoli will go to Iraq for the second time this summer, and the others have been there as well.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars, which counts Whitson's son-in-law as one of her children, knows of no other mother in the U.S. with four children on active duty, said Jim Maske, a state VFW Veterans Service officer.

Her sons and daughter were there to see her presented with a Blue Star banner on Sunday.

Whitson was escorted by the Patriot Guard to Wellington's VFW Post 881, where she received the banner in a ceremony. She will place the four-star banner in her front window to identify her as a military mom.

Whitson comes from a military family; her father and stepfather served in Korea and Vietnam, respectively. Her children's fathers and both of John Vincent's parents are veterans.

"They've grown up around it their whole lives," she said of her children. "(They like) the structure: going somewhere, doing something right. They don't take it lightly." Maske met Whitson at Fat Ernie's in Wichita, where she works. When he learned about her children, he decided a special ceremony was in order. "I said, 'That's gotta be honored,'æ" Maske said. "I'm so proud to be able to do this."

A certificate accompanying Whitson's Blue Star banner bears the signature of VFW Commander in Chief Glen Gardner.

Maske said he hopes Whitson's story will get the attention of other families with multiple military children; even though Whitson's the only one they know of with four, there are probably others, he said.

"It's humbling," Whitson said. "It's a lot of, 'What did I do to deserve this?' I'm not any more special than any other mother."

Her children beg to differ.

The ceremony happened, Cardaropoli said, because "somebody finally saw what we've seen my mom do for almost the past 30 years."

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He read a poem he'd written for the occasion that asked the crowd to thank Whitson, rather than her children, for serving her country.

"They've made me proud their whole lives," Whitson said. "I get to stand up tall because of them."



Photos by Jaime Oppenheimer/The Wichita Eagle

ABOVE: Kim Whitson stops to take photographs with her three children: U.S. Navy HM3 Tommy Cardarpoli, digital.olivesoftware.com/.../getFiles.as...

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Air Force Airman 1st Class Shellie Vincent and Army Pfc. Douglas Michael Taylor. TOP: Kim Whitson gets a hug from her friend Denise Lowrey, who helped honor Whitson as a Blue Star mother.



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