

Bringing Our Heroes Out to the Game

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Dayton Region, Ohio

“Hometown Heroes has truly become one of America’s great traditions.”

An 8-year-old boy says it’s been 180 days since his dad was deployed from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

“What I really miss about him is that he’s missing how good I’m getting at baseball and all my games,” the son says.

In the video that plays on the center-field scoreboard one evening in 2013, he, his two brothers and his mom describe what it’s like having a loved one deployed. When the video ends, the crowd stands and cheers as the Dayton Dragons mascots escort them to the field, and they are introduced as “our Hometown Hero family ... the family of Technical Sgt. Tyler Jones.”

Craig Campbell’s song “Family Man” begins to play.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Technical Sgt. Tyler Jones!”

The family turns around, and one by one, they spot Dad, the boys racing to him with matching grins and disappearing into a group hug.

“Sgt. Jones has returned home three weeks early to surprise his children tonight at Fifth Third Field.”

Emotional moments honoring service members and their families have become common at home games for the Dayton Dragons, a minor league team affiliated with the Cincinnati Reds. The Dragons were on the ground floor in 2003 when the Dayton Development Coalition founded the Hometown Heroes initiative, which honors the airmen and their families with free admission or sponsored tickets to sports, arts and entertainment events throughout the year. The program was founded with support from local companies and working in conjunction with Wright-Patterson and the Dragons.

Hometown Heroes is one of the most powerful programs of the 14-county Dayton region, where 27,000 uniformed personnel, civilians and defense contractors work to protect our nation’s security at Wright-Patterson. The Dayton area also is home to the Ohio Air

National Guard Base in Springfield and the Dayton Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which opened in 1867.

As part of the Hometown Heroes initiative, deployed service members have sent video greetings to be displayed to a packed stadium, including their loved ones, who get priority viewing spots on the field. Donated tickets allow military families to come to the game for free. New recruits have been sworn in on the field before sold-out crowds. The NCAA college basketball First Four games, held at the University of Dayton, follow a Hometown Heroes focus with tickets provided for service members. Several theater and performing arts organizations in the Dayton region now participate in the Hometown Heroes program by providing tickets or special performances.

“Hometown Heroes has truly become one of America’s great traditions. The series of events taking place across the Dayton region showcase the community’s passion for the United States Air Force and all who serve our nation in uniform,” said retired Lt. Gen. Tom Owen, a former Air Force Life Cycle Management Center commander who participated in many Hometown Heroes events while stationed at Wright-Patterson. “For the Dayton region, Hometown Heroes brings to visible action what many have come to know as our nation’s best community-based relationship. Hometown Heroes is a community-wide celebration honoring the airmen at Wright-Patterson. This is just one of the many great things being done for Wright-Patterson by the team at the Dayton Development Coalition.”

A little more than a century ago, two Dayton brothers changed history.

The area’s aviation goals have evolved. The mission today is national security.

In their day – according to David McCullough’s book, *The Wright Brothers* – Orville and Wilbur were “inseparable” and “indispensable to each other.”

Today, so are the airmen and their community. — RF
