

Fuller Hamlet plays soccer in Iraq

A world away



Photo by contributed photo
Cynthia Garceau in Iraq

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GHS

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Upton, Mass. -

For many phone callers, especially residents of Upton with the lack of cell service, losing a connection is a typical occurrence.

Upton resident Ray Garceau says he is used to getting cut off with his daughter, Cynthia.

But Cynthia Garceau, 29, is currently in Iraq, serving as a captain in the Army.

"Typically, we might get to talk to her for five minutes," Ray Garceau said. "Then you lose contact."

Cynthia, who previously served in Afghanistan, talks to her father and mother, Julie, about once every couple of weeks.

Because of the nature of her work as an explosive ordinance disposal technician, she cannot give too many details.

"Everything is top secret," Ray Garceau said, although he does know that EOD teams help get rid of bombs.

As a result, Garceau gets a lot of his information from the Internet.

That is where he found a short time ago by searching for her name a story about how she was training Iraqi police and also managing to do "something she's always loved," play soccer.

"They try to be friendly with the Iraqis," Ray Garceau said of the teamwork-building activity.

He said he was not surprised to find that she is playing the sport just outside Baghdad. "Anywhere there was a soccer game, she would go," he said. "She's a soccer junkie."

Cynthia, a center midfielder, played for a number of teams in Massachusetts. She played at Nipmuc Regional Middle/High School and then at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she had a full scholarship.

She also played for the Sutton Fuller Hamlets soccer club, a traveling team in the Massachusetts Premier League that was just about "unbeatable," her father recalled with a smile.

The coach of that team, Martyn Bowden, said Cynthia Garceau was a "terrific" player.

"She was very powerful. She never got flustered," said Bowden, who coached Garceau's team to eight championships. "She was just very responsive to coaching."

The country of Iraq is very receptive to soccer and has made gains in the sport recently, Bowden said.

"There's the old adage of soccer being the universal language, except in this country," he said with a laugh.

Julie Garceau was also not shocked to learn of her daughter's soccer playing in the Middle East.

"It's always been her passion," she said. "She's always been into building teams. She's a natural born leader."

For someone who was "always a jock," Cynthia Garceau was not destined for a desk job, her mother said.

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 had a strong effect on her, and shortly after she decided to enter the military.

"She said, 'Someone's got to do it, and I will,' " Julie Garceau said.

Now her parents "worry about her constantly," but get through the difficult time with friends, family and prayer, Julie said.

"It's all you can do," she said.

Today, on the sixth anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, the Garceaus will attend the "Thanks to Yanks" dinner, which honors military families.

And they are excited to see Cynthia soon, as she is scheduled to come back on leave in October.

During the two weeks when she is home, Cynthia will celebrate her July birthday, go shopping, see her boyfriend, and maybe even sneak in a trip to Disney World, according to her mother.

"It's her favorite place," Julie Garceau said.

Until then, Ray, a real estate agent, and Julie, a project manager business analyst, will try to stay busy while their daughter works on the other side of the world.

"We try not to think about it," Ray Garceau said. "There's really nothing you can do, but just look forward to when they come back."

And Julie Garceau has learned that five minutes on the phone with Cynthia is worth it, even if the conversation ends abruptly.

"I don't care as long as I hear her."