WMMC and UCM Join Forces to Allow Deployed Soldier to Witness Birth of Son via Skype

WARRENSBURG, MO (Feb. 10, 2015) – Staff Sgt. Mauricio Alejandro Arias, Whiteman Air Force Base, was awakened on June 14, 2014, for one of the most important events of his life—the birth of his second son at Western Missouri Medical Center in Warrensburg, Mo. He and his wife, Erin, a staff sergeant with the U.S. Air Force, were the parents of another son, Tristan, so Arias was familiar with what was about to happen and the role he would play.

However, when Elijah Christopher Arias arrived later that day, Arias was not in the delivery room. Instead, he was in Afghanistan, serving his deployment with the U.S. Army National Guard. Although he wasn’t able to be physically present for his son’s birth, he witnessed it and participated in it via Skype, with internet technology and the efforts of the staff at WMMC and the University of Central Missouri making it possible.

Upon his return from deployment, Arias, a UCM student pursuing a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and the 2014 recipient of the university’s Mike Carter Award for Exceptional Service to the University, Community and Military, joined representatives of UCM and WMMC Friday, Feb. 6, to thank them for their efforts in coordinating the live Skype of Elijah’s birth. Erin and Elijah were unable to attend as Elijah was recovering from an ear infection.

As the birth of his son drew closer last fall, Arias contacted Delilah Nichols, coordinator of military and veterans services in UCM’s Office of Military and Veteran Services, to ask if she thought it would be possible to Skype the birth of his son between WMMC and his location in Afghanistan. Nichols, in turn, contacted Judy Small, executive assistant at WMMC, and planning began. Darinda Reberry, vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer, and Renee Twenter, obstetrics director, joined forces with Bill Ladd, WMMC director of information services, and Scott Evans, WMMC technical support, to prepare the necessary technology for use in the delivery room.
“It is an honor for me to be called to serve my country, and some may call us heroes,” Arias said to the UCM and WMMC personnel present. “But my heroes are here—you are my heroes. It meant a lot to me to be able to see my son’s birth and first day. I was not there, but I WAS there.”

Arias also displayed a UCM flag that he had taken with him on his deployment. Signed by all the members of his unit, he carried the flag on 26 missions in Afghanistan. Upon his return, he presented the signed flag to the staff of the Office of Military and Veteran Services.

“It was special for us to get to be a part of this,” said Reberry. “This is the first time we’ve had a request like this, and we’re pleased that we were able to make it possible for Alejandro and Erin. We’re here to serve our community and our military friends, and it took a special effort by members of the information services team and the obstetrics department here at the hospital to make it a reality.”

Michael Grelle, UCM vice provost for academic programs and services, presented Arias UCM Mules hooded sweatshirts for both of his sons and t-shirts for him and his wife, gifts from the UCM’s University Store.

“UCM recognizes the contributions of our active duty military and veterans, and we’re here to honor one of our own today,” Grelle said. “We also want to thank all of the staff at WMMC for responding to Alejandro’s request. The dedication to this family and our community is much appreciated.”

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CUTLINE INFORMATION

Staff Sgt. Mauricio Alejandro Arias, center, recently visited with Western Missouri Medical Center and University of Central Missouri staff to express his appreciation for their efforts in arranging the Skype transmission of the birth of his son during his recent deployment in Afghanistan. Joining Arias were, left to right, Michael Grelle, UCM vice provost for academic programs and services; Delilah Nichols, coordinator in the UCM Office of Military and Veteran Services; Bill Ladd, WMMC director of information services; Darinda Reberry, WMMC vice president of patient services and chief nursing officer; Renee Twenter, WMMC director of obstetric services; and Lisa Morse, UCM school VA certifying official.