

Freedom Fund to host benefit concert in Pequannock for local soldiers

BY DONNA ROLANDO
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Adrian Simone

Serving the United States in Afghanistan was not without tragic consequences for two young men from [Morris County](#).

Derek McConnell, 22, of East Hanover and Adrian Simone, about 19, a [Montville](#) High School grad, both lost their legs in explosions in Afghanistan in 2011 and have spent months engaged in the fight toward their recovery.

To help with an ordeal that has stretched their family finances, a benefit concert will be presented 8 p.m. on Saturday, May 12 at the [Pequannock](#) Township High School auditorium, which the school board has donated for this event.

Although Family & Friends for Freedom Fund



Inc., the benefit's sponsor, has served more than 350 military families with grants exceeding \$650,000 since 2005, founder Kathy Sturla said this is an opportunity for the nonprofit to assist those in need close to home by splitting all the proceeds between the two young men.

Because these young men are from the Suburban Trends area, Sturla has hopes that the Sunset Road auditorium, which seats 600 people, will be filled to gather a minimum of \$5,000 each for their needs.

Since the Freedom Fund is nonprofit and run by volunteers, she said, "Every ticket sold will be split between the two families."

A [Pompton Plains](#) resident, Sturla said she initiated Freedom Fund because she knew first-hand what families endure when they get the call that a loved one has been seriously hurt in war...the need to drop everything and spend weeks, if not months, at your child's bedside, resulting in financial consequences back home.

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Her son, Gunnery Sgt. Jim Sturla, was in a tank hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in Iraq on Sept. 22, 2004. Twenty-seven surgeries later and with an elbow that's rebuilt, he's still in the Marines, deployed this time in Africa, said his mom.

During the fight for recovery, "you don't even care about bills," she said, as you dedicate your time and strength to seeing your child through a medical nightmare. Yet these financial pressures don't go away, she said.



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A large, eye-catching advertisement for All American Ford. On the left, a cartoon football player in a blue jersey with the number 1 is shown. The text 'PRE-SEASON SAVINGS ITS GO TIME!' is written in a bold, red and white font. The central focus is '\$500 OFF MSRP' in large, yellow, 3D-style letters. Below this, it says 'TOWARDS THE PURCHASE OF ANY NEW FORD • LINCOLN • MERCURY • SUBARU VEHICLE'. At the bottom, the website 'www.ALL.AMERICAN.FORD.NET' is listed, along with the text 'MUST BE PRESENT AT TIME OF PURCHASE'. Logos for Ford, Lincoln, Mercury, Subaru, and Volvo are also present.

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