

A nonprofit steps up to raise money, outfit nurseries for military families having babies

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A full-scale blitz is under way to stock the nurseries of Southern California's military families who are expecting babies.

Operation Showers of Appreciation is an Oceanside-based nonprofit that has helped hundreds of military families from Camp Pendleton to Twentynine Palms. The most recent mission: A Saturday fete in Riverside honoring eight couples with everything they needed, from diapers and car seats to cribs and strollers.

The organization has held showers for 400 mothers-to-be across Southern California since 2006, but this was the first in Riverside County.

"Aside from the baby items these families are in need of, we are offering support and gratitude to these families who give so much and ask for so little in return," said Shari Wolf, of Riverside, who organized the local shower.

Among the families honored were Garrett and Brooke Marsh, of French Valley, near Murrieta, who have a 4-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. The couple thought they were finished having children so they gave their crib, changing table and other essentials to two young men in Garrett Marsh's unit at Camp Pendleton whose wives were pregnant.

Then, seven months ago, the Marshes found they were pregnant again. Brooke's friend signed them up for Operation Showers of Appreciation, and Brooke handed over their gift registry -- full except for the bassinet they've purchased for next to their bed.

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Brooke Marsh, wife of Marine Sgt. Garrett Marsh, opens gifts at All Saints Episcopal Church in Riverside with her children Ashlyn, 4, at right, and Blake, 2, in front. Eight military families were treated to a baby shower to help them get ready for the addition to their family.

"It's just a huge blessing that the community comes together like that, especially with the economy the way it is," Brooke said.

What's more, this will be the first time Garrett Marsh, a Marine infantry sergeant, will be home for the later stages of pregnancy and his baby's birth. He was in Iraq when his other two children were born.

"We thought he'd missed out. He'd never seen me past three months pregnancy except in pictures," Brooke said. "This is huge for us."

family stress

The program was started by Kimberly Felshaw, a former soldier whose husband, Josh, is a Marine staff sergeant at Camp Pendleton. After their first pregnancy in 2005, Felshaw