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Job waited for soldier to return

Snohomish feed store springs welcoming party and a surprise

By Brian Kelly
Herald Writer

Sometime this weekend, Matt Missel will jump into his red Jeep, point it east and drive off.

He'll probably be wearing the same smile he had when he pulled into the parking lot at Dayville Hay & Grain in Snohomish on Tuesday. Missel rolled up and started honking at co-workers he hadn't seen since he left last year for Kuwait and the Iraq war.

Missel, 21, a soldier with the Army Reserve's 909th Adjutant General Company, and other members of his Bothell-based platoon returned from a yearlong deployment to Kuwait late in January.

Missel said he spent the year helping sort and distribute more than 21 million pounds of mail bound for soldiers in the Middle East. This week, he went back to the place where he'd had a job delivering hay and grain to farms in the county.

But the folks at Dayville Hay & Grain had a



Julie Busch / The Herald

Matt Missel (right) greets Snohomish County Councilman John Koster at Dayville Hay & Grain in Snohomish on Tuesday. Missel's former boss, Bob Day (second from right), presented him with a check for \$2,500 in appreciation of his military service in Kuwait. At far left is Snohomish County Councilman Jeff Sax.

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With a "Welcome Home Matt!" sign stretched across the loading dock, his former co-workers took a break from moving pallets stacked with 40-pound bags of wood pellets to gather around the soldier.

It was a small celebration, but a big deal.

A Seattle TV news crew slipped a microphone on Missel as reporters lined up. County Council members Jeff Sax and John Koster came by to say thanks.

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Missel's what's-the-big-fuss embarrassment quickly turned to shock as Bob and Angela Day, owners of Dayville Hay & Grain, pulled out an oversized check for \$2,500 and presented it to him.

"We missed him. And we just wanted him to know how much we appreciated the sacrifice he made for all of us," Bob Day said.

"He always came to work with a good attitude. Everybody enjoyed working with him," Day said. "We are just proud to welcome him back home."

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Missel was one of 15 employees at the feed store and the only one in the military reserves. He's now three years into an eight-year agreement.

"When you go over there, you're just doing your job. You come home and you don't expect all this, all the attention," he said.

Missel joined the Army while he was in his senior year at Snohomish High School.

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Leslie Missel, the soldier's mother, said her son didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. When he first started thinking about joining the military, she went with him to a recruiter.

"We're very happy to have him back. We can't get enough of him," Leslie Missel said.

She said she's noticed how the Army has changed him. He's still a lanky outdoorsman, but he's more patient now and more focused, she said. "He's a man now," his mother added.

Missel agrees that the Army has made him more patient.

"When you're working with these guys every day for 12 hours a day or more, and then you have to sleep in the same tent with them, you have to try and get along," he said. "Otherwise, it gets pretty rough."

Missel is still adjusting to life back home. Although he doesn't have to sleep in an eight-man tent anymore, he said he sometimes needs to play rock classics from the Scorpions or Everclear to catch some shut-eye.

"It was hard to sleep because it was quiet. I was used to the generator noise and the people noise and the air-conditioning noise," he said.

Missel returns to his old job at Dayville Hay & Grain in April.

This weekend, he plans to drive to Dearborn, Mich., to visit his grandparents.

"I was with lots of people for a year. This is going to be time for me to think about what I really am," he said.

Reporter Brian Kelly: 425-339-3422 or kelly@heraldnet.com.

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