

*Sponsored by Vermont American Tools and administered by VFW, Unmet Needs has helped more than 1,400 military families, including that of an active-duty soldier who recently became a father.*

**By Kelly Lanigan**

# Unmet Needs Helps Families From the Start

In the midst of an economic downturn, many aid agencies and programs have seen an increase in the number of applicants. In the first part of FY08, *Unmet Needs* assisted 253 families, up 8% from the same period in FY07. The program has now surpassed the \$2 million mark in total donations to military families facing hard times.

One of these families is that of Maj. Eric Duckworth, executive officer of the Army's I Corps Special Troops Battalion, VFW member-at-large and Iraq War vet.

## Special Delivery

Eric's wife, Shannon, was scheduled to give birth on March 10, 2008, but developed complications and was hospitalized Jan. 8 in Tacoma, Wash. Delivery was imminent, and facilities to accommodate premature births were not available in the area. She was transferred to a hospital in Seattle, 47 miles away.

Doctors ordered preterm delivery to save the baby's and mother's lives. A son, Asa, was born on Jan. 18. Shannon was discharged from the hospital three days later, but Asa required care until Feb. 12. Throughout this time, Eric traveled to

care for Shannon, and later the two constantly went to Seattle to visit Asa.

The Duckworths factored into their budget the costs of medical care in the Fort Lewis/Tacoma area, but a near-daily commute of 96 miles, meals and parking at the hospital racked up nearly \$1,000.

"With the birth of Asa two months ahead of schedule and the extra incurred costs, we expended what we had saved for his arrival and had to start spending earlier, too," Eric said.

In addition, according to the Duckworths, TRICARE only compensates travel and lodging for hospitalization of a dependent more than 100 miles away. Medicaid would have covered the costs if Asa were hospitalized more than 30 days.

"Thankfully, his health allowed for his release after 25 days, but we found ourselves unable to pay the additional charges without going further into debt," Eric said.

Then Eric found out about *Unmet Needs* through *MilitaryOneSource.com*. *Unmet Needs* was able to provide a \$500 Wal-Mart gift card, which the Duckworths used for diapers, preemie (premature baby) clothing, a stroller, groceries

and a few learning toys.

"Shannon and I were greatly touched by the generosity of the VFW and Vermont American Power Tools," Eric said. "The gift card helped replace the money we had put aside for the baby, but instead had to use on travel costs."

Asa and Shannon are fully recovered and now at home. "Asa is thriving and continues to show all the promise of being fully healthy and developing normally," Eric said. ☺

## Vermont American Power Tool Accessories

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As of April 8, 2008, *Unmet Needs*, part of VFW's National Military Services, has helped 1,460 families. If you know of a qualified family in need, contact *Unmet Needs*.

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