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# FAMILY SUPPORT: Coombs Foundation holds a party for people observing the holidays without loved ones

By DOUG LEVY  
For The Patriot Ledger

FOXBORO - For Randolph's Melida Arredondo, this year will be the first Christmas since her stepson Alexander Arredondo was killed in Iraq in 2004 that "we are feeling Christmasy."

Those positive holiday feelings are being fostered, in part, Arredondo said, by people who, in similar situations, have reached out to her for advice.

Monday night found Arredondo and her husband, Carlos, at Gillette Stadium, as the Jeffrey Coombs Memorial Foundation held its first holiday party for families of Bay Staters who have either been killed overseas or are serving away from their loved ones.

Nearly 450 family members turned out to meet athletes and celebrities including Patriots players Kevin Faulk, Matt Light and Russ Hochstein, as well as Academy Award-winning actor and Kingston resident Chris Cooper.

Jeffrey Coombs of Abington was killed on American Airlines Flight 11 on Sept. 11, 2001. For Coombs' wife, Christie, Monday's event was a way to show her appreciation to the families of those serving our country.

"I wanted to give them a distraction, something to look forward to," she said, "and we've just gotten so much support from the community - it has been incredible."

Almost the entire cost of the event - which Coombs thought of in October - was paid for with donations, both private and corporate.

While Jeffrey Coombs has been gone more than six years now, "You can move on, but you can't move past that void," Christie said. "We have gotten used to waking up without Jeff (on Christmas), but it doesn't make it any easier.

"I hope that next year the war will be over, and we don't have to (have a similar event) but if we're in a similar situation, we will."

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Transmitted Tuesday, December 11, 2007

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