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## PRESS RELEASE

### Freedom Calls- Free Videoconferencing to Montana Families Overseas

December 27, 2004 Missoula, Mont – Blackfoot Telecommunications Group, Vision Net, METNET, members of the Montana Healthcare Telecommunications Alliance, the Eastern Montana Telemedicine Network (EMTN) at Deaconess Billings Clinic, Partners in Health Telemedicine Network (PHTN) at St. Vincent Healthcare, REACH Telemedicine Network, and the Montana District Courts have joined the “Freedom Calls Network” to offer free videoconferencing to Montana families and their military family member(s) deployed overseas.

The high tech project was launched in April 2004 by Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit devoted to improving the lines of communication between American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and their families at home.

Blackfoot Telecommunications Group, Vision Net, EMTN, PHTN, the Montana District Courts and METNET have videoconferencing equipment in different cities around Montana that makes it possible for people to talk with their family members face-to-face. These organizations have consented to the free use of their own facilities to all families with military members deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Blackfoot, headquartered in Missoula, is one of the owning companies of Vision Net. Vision Net has access to over 150 commercial and educational videoconference sites on its network throughout Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming and is encouraging all of its conference site owners to participate in the project. The Montana District Courts and METNET conduct state and court business on a daily basis. EMTN and PHTN studios are traditionally used by doctors to examine patients in rural Montana communities.

“We are proud to offer this opportunity to Montana families” said Rob Ferris, VP of Sales & Marketing at Blackfoot. “We anticipate, with the continued deployment of these facilities, we will be able to meet a high demand by service men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan who wish to see and talk to their families back here in Montana.”

So far, the Freedom Calls Foundation has deployed two interactive facilities in Iraq, one at Camp Cooke, north of Baghdad, and the other at Camp Fallujah. The Army has asked that the foundation install 8 more facilities in Iraq and 2 in Afghanistan in the coming months. These facilities employ the latest in videoconferencing technology and Internet based IP soft-phone technology and cost approximately \$300,000.00 each to build. This is all being done with private donations at no expense to the taxpayer.

The state-wide toll free number for all information concerning Freedom Calls is 1-866-354-VNET (8638) or you can visit the Freedom Calls web site at [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org). The Montana consortium of videoconferencing networks is currently constructing a web site that you can visit at [www.freedomcalls.vnet-inc.com](http://www.freedomcalls.vnet-inc.com).

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#### About Blackfoot Telecommunications Group

Named after the Blackfoot River running through much of the territory it serves, the Blackfoot (Blackfoot) Telecommunications Group was originally established in 1954 as Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative. Blackfoot offers state-of-the-art telecommunications, Internet and data solutions to customers in Missoula and throughout Montana and Idaho. Headquartered in Missoula, Montana, Blackfoot employs more than 165 Montanans. Blackfoot can be reached at 406-541-5000 or through its web site at <http://www.blackfoot.com>.

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