



Arts

Supporters Pack Emagine Theater for Opening of 'One Soldier's Story'

Proceeds from the emotional film about fall soldier and his family's grief will benefit Mikie's Minutes charity named for 'a true American hero.'

By [Jessica Schrader](#)

Those who attended the premiere of the documentary *One Soldier's Story* on Wednesday night got a heart-wrenching look at what is often only seen as a statistic on the evening news.

As supporters of local fallen soldier Sgt. Michael Ingram Jr. and his family filled a screening room at Emagine Royal Oak to honor Ingram and support a charity his family established in his name, they were taken on a journey rarely seen by those not immediately affected by it.

They got a glimpse at the life of an everyday boy, brother and son who loved listening to Elvis and dreamed of visiting Graceland, of a teacher's favorite kid who could make anyone smile and a faithful friend who would do anything – like eat worms or break into dance – to entertain his buddies. They got to know the goofy guy who was described as being just like his dad, both sharing a “nonstop enjoyment of life,” and the protective big brother who always looked out for his sister.

They learned how the 8-year-old boy from Monroe who loved playing with GI Joes and talked about becoming a soldier eventually became a soldier – and



Patriot Guard riders pull into the Emagine Theater in Royal Oak for the premier of "One Soldier's Story." Credit: [Jessica Schrader](#)

how his leadership skills helped motivate those around him and made him stand out in his platoon to a high-ranking general. That same leadership and dedication made him decide to stay deployed in Afghanistan even when given the chance to return home due to an injury. "I'm not leavin' my boys," he'd told his dad in one of his last phone calls home.

Viewers then stepped into the lives of a local mom and dad left heartbroken after news came that their Mikie had been killed April 17, 2010 at age 23 when his platoon encountered an improvised explosive device during a mission. The film follows Ingram's family through the honors Ingram received when his body was returned home, his funeral and the gravestone ceremony. His parents' intense dedication and pride for their son is illustrated throughout the film.

"It's emotional," Ingram's mother Patricia Kitts said after the film was shown. "He's a true American hero."

His father, Michael Ingram Sr. said after the premiere that although the film was emotionally difficult to shoot, it was worth it to honor his son and ultimately benefit Mikie's Minutes, a nonprofit that provides free calling cards to deployed soldiers so they can call home anytime, anywhere.

"It's definitely hard, but it's an honor," he said.

Ingram said he hopes the film will help "get the word out" so Mikie's Minutes can reach its goal of distributing 1 million minutes by the end of the year.

Michael Ingram's parents said the fact that soldiers have to use their own money to call home was one of their son's pet peeves. "We don't think they should have to do that," Kitts said.

Filmmaker Keith Famie, a nine-time Emmy winner and former local chef and restaurant owner also known for his stint on the reality show *Survivor*, learned about Ingram while filming footage for another documentary. He decided to create *One Soldier's Story* after talking with Ingram's family members about their desire to start Mikie's Minutes.

"This is the start of something very big," said Famie, a former Royal Oak resident.

The film helps people understand a topic that is rarely discussed, Famie said. "It teaches you things you can't even fathom," he said.

One Soldier's Story includes footage from on the ground in Afghanistan, along with commentary from one of Ingram's platoon brothers and a Rolling Stone reporter who spent time with the platoon after Ingram's death.

Jennifer Speer, 22, of Royal Oak, was one of more than 300 viewers at

Wednesday night's premiere. "I tried not to cry," Speer said. "It's hard. You never really see what's going on (in Afghanistan). That's the reality over there."

Farmington Hills resident Robert Rhinehart, who grew up in Monroe, said watching the film was even more emotional knowing Ingram was from his former hometown. "That was crazy," he said.

Army Sgt. William O'Reilly, who was part of Sgt. Ingram's funeral team, attended the premiere. "I think it's important to remember the people that didn't make it home," he said.

Ingram's mother Kitts said the military has continued to be a strong source of support for the family. "The Army is still there for us, they haven't forgotten about us at all," she said. "They're like our family."

Sharon Lewinski, fourth district president of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary covering Wayne County, attended the premier with other members of the group. "It's important for us to support veteran's families," said Lewinski, of Southgate. "We have to stay together."

How to see 'One Soldier's Story'

One Soldier's Story is expected to air on PBS on Sept. 11, 2011. For more information on the film or Mikie's Minutes, visit <http://v-prod.com/onesoldiersstory.html> or www.mikiesminutes.com.

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