

Group comes through for wounded GI's family

By **Jules Crittenden**

Thursday, September 30, 2004

Thanks to a local benefactor, Amy Lathan can drive and give her 4-year-old son and her wounded husband home-cooked meals.

“They have made things so much easier,” Lathan said of the Melrose-based Weber Foundation's Freedom Fund. “These are daily life things I shouldn't be stressing about.”

Sgt. James Lathan Jr. was paralyzed from the neck down when he was hit by shrapnel July 4 in Baghdad. He was moved to the West Roxbury Veterans Administration's spinal cord injury unit last month.

Amy Lathan and her son moved into a local motel and were relying on a shuttle bus. Army per diem payments didn't cover a rental car, and young James' preschool tuition was coming out of an Army paycheck. The Freedom Fund last week awarded the Lathans \$6,000 to cover those costs. Meanwhile, a woman who read about the Lathan family gave young James his first bicycle.

“It's just helped a whole lot,” Amy Lathan said. “I just want to thank them. Now I can concentrate on my husband's care.”

The Freedom Fund was established in 2003 to help service families with expenses that aren't covered by the military. Families can apply for grants at www.theweberfoundation.com.