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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAVID GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES; JEFF SPORN/ABC; BILL BERZELI/CONTOUR LINE

People
HEROES
AMONG US

The death of Army Cpl. Brock Bucklin "brought the war home to me," says Rooney, recently promoted to major (with Bucklin's son Jacob, 6, in Grand Rapids, Mich.).



CPL. BROCK BUCKLIN

Honoring the Fallen

Dan Rooney pays tribute to servicemen and women by sending their families to college

As Dan Rooney's flight landed at the Grand Rapids airport on a rainy June night in 2006, the pilot made an announcement: "The body of an American hero is onboard. As a sign of respect, please remain seated." For the next 30 minutes, Rooney watched as soldiers carried the flag-draped casket of Cpl. Brock Bucklin onto the tarmac, where his 4-year-old son waited in the arms of his grandmother. Rooney, an F-16 pilot and Iraq war veteran, wept quietly, thinking of his wife and two daughters back home. "What if that were Jacqy and the girls," he thought. "I had to do something."

In that brief moment, Rooney's life changed. The Oklahoma Air National Guardsman and golf pro decided to

provide college scholarships for the kids and spouses of service people killed or disabled in the line of duty. Enlisting the support of the PGA, Rooney, 35, launched Patriot Golf Day last Labor Day and raised \$1 million by asking golfers at 3,400 courses to kick in an extra dollar in greens fees. Since then, through his nonprofit Folds of Honor Foundation (go to www.folds-of-honor.org for info on this year's Patriot Golf Day), he's handed out 200 scholarships. Though Ginger Gilbert Ravella received death benefits and is eligible for educational grants from the Veterans Administration for her five kids after her husband, Troy, died in Iraq, Gilbert Ravella thanks Rooney from the depths of her heart: "I don't know how I

would have paid for them all." No one appreciates Rooney's concern more than Bucklin's family. He contributed \$5,000 to a 529 educational fund for Bucklin's son Jacob, now 6, and will do so every year until the boy turns 18. "I am so grateful to Mr. Rooney," says Jacob's mom, Michelle Price. It's the least he can do, says Rooney, who will return to Iraq this fall: "I want these families to know we appreciate their sacrifice."

By Sharon Cotliar

Know a hero? Send suggestions to HEROESAMONGUS@PEOPLEMAG.COM

COURTESY BUCKLIN FAMILY