

# Daytona Beach News Journal

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## **Magnet for Controversy**

### **What are you supporting with car ribbons?**

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Article Text:

Sarah Ball literally tied a yellow ribbon 'round her old oak tree in her DeBary front lawn.

She put it there to honor her brothers who served in the U.S. Army, her daughter in the U.S. Navy Reserves and other family members who have fought for America.

"It's a phenomenal thing what they do for our country," Ball said.

But when last year's hurricanes toppled the old oak with the frayed yellow ribbon, Ball said she opted for a new and different way to display her patriotism: a yellow ribbon magnet on her car.

The ubiquitous magnets - saying "Support Our Troops" - are stuck on cars across the country and the designs have diversified to include camouflage and flag varieties as well as ribbons supporting a cure for breast cancer, tsunami aid and autism awareness.

And the symbolism for the troops magnets has been interpreted to mean any number of things - from supporting an individual soldier to all-out support of the war in! Iraq.

"To me, it is don't forget where they are," said Ball, a Seminole County school bus driver. "I support what our young men and women are doing."

The yellow ribbon began as a folk tale about a prisoner returning home to his family, as far as historians can tell. But it became popular in American culture both through song and when Penne Laingen tied a yellow ribbon around her oak tree for her husband to untie when he came home. He was the U.S. ambassador in Iran being held hostage there in November 1979. During the first Gulf War, people across the country wore or displayed the ribbons as a symbol for those serving overseas.

Jason Marquis, 26, an Army specialist who spent a year in Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom, said he felt pride seeing the yellow ribbon magnets when he returned home to Deltona.

"People who support the troops don't have to support the war. Most people know we're just doing our jobs and want to support us in that," said Marquis, who re-enlisted for another six years and will serve a post in Germany. "It's just a magnet, yes, but the fact they would put it on their car means something."

Stetson University Professor Paul Jerome Croce said the recent public displays began after Sept. 11, 2001 with flags, which showed support for the country, troops and administration. Now, people have turned to the ribbons for the troops.

"People feel a kind of human connection to the troops," the American studies chairman said.

Croce said last year's election brought a lot of issues to the surface and part of the patriotism is an aftershock of the heated debates, but people are no longer voting for a candidate.

"I'm voting for the troops," he said of the sentiment.

Chris Hales, spokesman for Magnet America, which claims to be the first seller of the popular car decor, said the ribbons are "a new way to express yourself."

At its peak, the North Carolina company sold more than 1 million magnets a month to retailers across the country, but Hales said less-expensive copies by manufacturers in China and elsewhere cut into its sales.

The company started in September 2003 simply as a way to help local groups raise money for care packages to send overseas, he said.

"It just kind of grew out of something (founder) Dwayne (Gillian) did overnight on the Internet," Hales said. "It happened so fast."

The company donated half of the profits to charities last year, including military causes such as USO groups and FreedomCause.org, an outlet for families to video conference with loved ones in Iraq. It also donated "hundreds of thousands" of magnets to local groups to use as fund-raisers.

And their popularity led to the creation of a variety of magnet ribbons. Hales said they listened to customers' suggestions and developed ribbons saying "Pray for our Troops," and "Keep my Daddy (or Mommy) safe."

" 'Freedom isn't free' was a big one," he said.

Regardless of the messages on the ribbons, Hales said ! they are meant to show support for our people in war.

"They have a heart and a soul and we care about them, and we don't want them to get hurt," he said. "You should be loved by your country, no matter if we support what's going on."

But that's why Colin Ernst and his friend Andreas Beck of Philadelphia developed the "Bring Home our Troops" message on a blue magnetic ribbon. Ernst said the yellow ribbons have become politicized to mean explicit support for the war and have drifted from the original meaning of the yellow ribbon.

"It meant 'bring our loved ones home'," he said.

The ribbons are distributed through the company's Web site, TroopsRibbon.com, and a few retailers. Ernst said a portion of the profits are donated to veterans organizations, including Veterans for Peace and Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Ernst said his ribbons are a way for people to show support with a new message: "Let's bring them home to be with their families."

It's all a matter of interpretation.

Stetson's Croce said the ribbons are open-ended and their meaning is pretty ambiguous, which may prompt some people to oppose them.

"What does that mean?" he said of the "Support our Troops" phrase. "Does that mean we also support the policy? That's a lot of baggage."

- Staff Writer Jeannine Gage contributed to this report.

Did You Know?

Magnets - ribbons and other emblems - are being placed on cars by owners seeking to promote a cause or show their loyalty. But car owners beware - you need to give that magnet, and your car, a little attention to avoid damage to your paint job.

\* Moisture can get trapped between the magnet and your car's surface. With the hot summer months approaching, that moisture can "boil" the clear-coat finish underneath the magnet, leaving a faded spot once the magnet is removed.

\* You can avoid damage by occasionally removing the magnet, wiping it off and waxing the area underneath the magnet. Moving the magnet to a different spot on your vehicle weekly is also a good way to minimize damage.

- Compiled by News Researcher Megan Gallup

SOURCES: Bloomington Herald-Times, [www.abc-7.com](http://www.abc-7.com)

Caption:

Photo 1: Uncaptioned photo of a "Support Our Troops" magnet.

Photo 2: Uncaptioned photo of a patriotic ribbon.

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