

Kraxberger Retires from Oregon Army National Guard

by Diane Rodriguez

Command Sergeant Major Denise Kraxberger retired from the Oregon Army National Guard in March following more than 34 years of service to her country.

In a ceremony held at the Oregon Military Department in Salem, Ore., Kraxberger received numerous awards from her superiors, the soldiers she led, Gov. Ted Kulongoski and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, represented by Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley and Tribal Council member Robert Kentta.

"Along with her family, friends and hundreds of others, Robert Kentta and I attended and bestowed upon her, on behalf of the Siletz Tribe, a gift of a Treaty blanket," said Pigsley in the April issue of *Siletz News*. "It was indeed a proud and memorable occasion for Robert and I."



Photo by Natasha Kavanaugh

Denise Kraxberger delivers the keynote address at this year's Memorial Day Ceremony at the Paul Washington Cemetery in Siletz.

Military Career Not Initial Goal

Kraxberger didn't start out to make a career in the National Guard.

"I graduated from high school in June of 1974. I had a full-time job as a file clerk for an insurance company. But I also liked to party. My mom must have known that there was trouble ahead if I didn't straighten my life out," she remembered. Given a choice of college or the military, Kraxberger chose the military.

"I went around and took tests for every service, then laid low, ignoring phone calls from various recruiters. One day in late September 1974, I came home from work early. There sitting at the table with my mom was a National Guardsman, who was put on active duty to help recruit for his unit. The paperwork was filled out and the consent form was signed," she said. "On Monday morning I reported to the

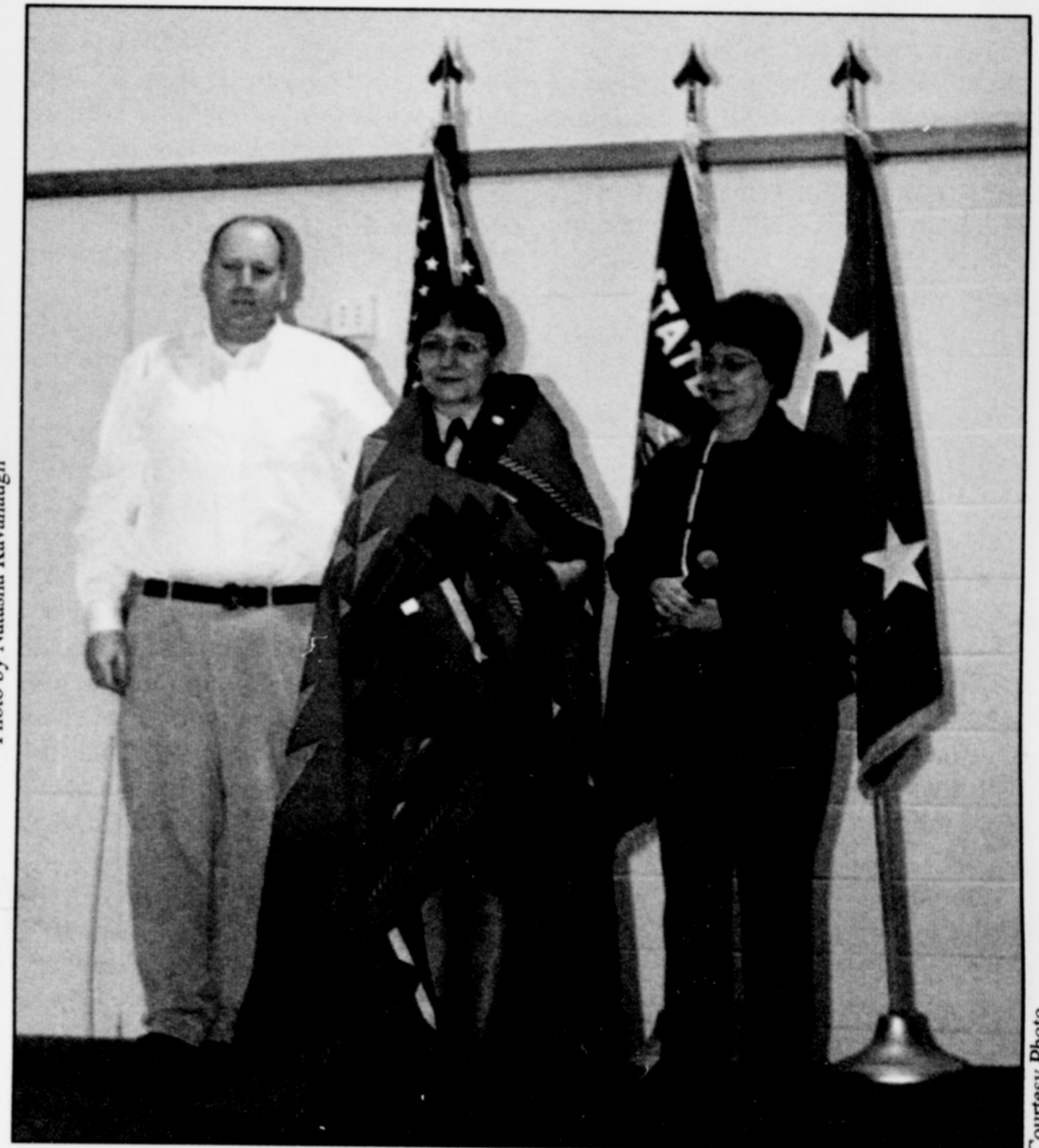
local National Guard unit and swore in for three years. I told my mom, okay but I'm only staying for three years. I started out not wanting to be in the military and ended after 34 years never wanting to leave."

Kraxberger started in the National Guard as a report clerk. Through the next several years, she moved up in both job responsibility (in the personnel area) and military rank. In September 2000, she became the first female command sergeant major in Oregon, which is the lead support person to the battalion commander.

Service Includes One Deployment

She completed a year-long deployment in May 2004 with the 641st Medical Evacuation Battalion.

"My battalion headquarters deployed to Fort Bragg in April of 2003. We thought



Courtesy Photo

Robert Kentta and Delores Pigsley present Command Sergeant Major Denise Kraxberger with a Tribal Treaty blanket at Kraxberger's retirement ceremony in March. She retired from the Oregon Army National Guard after more than 34 years of service.

there was a possibility that we would swap out with the regular Army battalion we were covering down for, but we stayed at Fort Bragg," she said. "I did go to Afghanistan in January 2003 to visit the soldiers from one of the 641st units (1042 Medical Company) that were deployed."

In addition to being the liaison to the battalion commander, Kraxberger also was responsible for making sure her soldiers received the training they needed and the recognition they deserved.

Upon returning from Ft. Bragg, Kraxberger received some of the recognition she deserved. She was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and also the Iron Mike Award from the 44th Medical Command, Command Sergeant Major William Franklin. CSM Franklin flew to Oregon for the redeployment ceremony specifically to award her the Iron Mike.

"He said he had never given this award to a Leg (someone who doesn't parachute out of aircraft)," said Kraxberger. "The plaque on the Iron Mike statue reads 'CSM Denise Kraxberger May 2003 to April 2004. Thank you for raising the standards for CSMs in the 44th MEDCOM. Your leadership and professionalism stands alone. Airborne ... All the way!'"

She completed her military career as the commandant of the HQ 249 Regional Training Institute. At her retirement ceremony, she was awarded the Legion of Merit (one of the highest awards given to military members) and the Oregon Exceptional Service Medal.

Although Kraxberger has retired from the military, she hasn't completely left it behind.

"I am working for the Regional Training Institute in Monmouth, Oregon, as the quality assurance manager. I have weekends free now to spend more time with my grandchildren," she said. "Someday maybe I'll run for Tribal Council."

Battle Rapper's Mom Had Musical Dreams Too

by Brent Merrill

Siletz Tribal member Tamra Russell has her hands full. She not only works full time at the Native American Youth Association's (NAYA) Family Center, but she also is the mother of World Champion Battle Rap Superstar Greg Poe and that keeps her hopping.

Russell, whose parents were Bernadine and Joseph Washington, works at NAYA as the association's employment program manager. Bernadine passed when Russell was only 9 years old. Russell's grandmother was Mary Brown.

As a child she remembers visiting Siletz with her mom every summer and often on the weekends. After her mom passed away, Russell and her brothers, Damon and Derek, were raised in Northwest Portland with their father and his wife. Russell shared that Damon passed away in 2005.

Russell takes great pride in Poe's accomplishments in music and in their relationship, which is strong. He looks out for her and acknowledges her and she looks out for him and provides him with things like food and cell phones and love.

When we caught up with her, she shared that Poe was just getting home from being on tour for the last couple of weeks and she had replenished his need for groceries and communication.

She said Greg is "huge" in Australia because of his defeat of a couple of rappers from Down Under. The word spread and now his legend continues to grow and spread internationally.

Russell had dreams of her own before she set them aside to raise Poe and guide him through his life and career. She wanted to sing.

"When Greg was younger, probably 12 or 13 years old, he asked me if I regretted not pursuing my dream to become a singer because I was so young when I had him," remembered Russell, who was just shy of 18 when Poe was born. "I told him 'absolutely not!' I told him that we make choices in life and sometimes we don't know where they may take us. I told him that I loved him very much and that whatever dream he has I will support him fully. I am very proud of Greg and I know that his dreams will come true."

She takes pride in knowing that her son is one of the best in the world at what he does, if not the best. She takes comfort in knowing that her son has vowed to never give up on his dream - and he got that desire from her.