Bessie Wetzell Newspaper Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

HEPPNER 50¢
Gazette Times

VOL. 126 NO. 6 10 Pages Wednesday, February 7, 2007 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Local soldier becomes pen pal with students from Georgia

Editor's Note: The following article appeared in The Summerville News on December 26, 2006.

Summerville Middle School teacher Donna Fletcher wanted to get the students in her language arts class excited about writing letters.

"Which is hard, because [this is the age] of emails and all that," she smiled, "but then I came up with the idea of having them write to a soldier, and they loved that."

More than sixty students wrote to the brother of a friend of Fletcher's, currently serving in Afghanistan, SFC David McCurry.

Months passed and Fletcher assumed that the soldier received the letters; however, without hearing from him she had no real way of knowing.

And then, one day several months later, Fletcher received a package from Afghanistan.

"It was the letters we wrote, plus responses to each student, plus a DVD and flag that had flown in Afghanistan," she said. "I was so excited."

SFC David McCurry's helicopter

Fletcher said that each student had asked SFC McCurry several questions in their letters and that he had taken the time to answer each student personally.

"I was amazed he did that," she smiled. "It was wonderful. He was a real hero to these kids, in more ways than one."

Some of the letters SMS students sent abroad are included below, along with SFC McCurry's responses.

Letters

Dear Ms. Fletcher,

I appreciated all the cards and letters from your class. I have enjoyed reading them all. It is always nice to hear from the home front. I appreciate your prayers and concerns. By the time you get these back I should be on my way home or close to leaving Afghanistan.

I am a readiness NCO on the Active Duty side, which means I plan and train units to succeed in war. I plan supplies, equipment, soldiers and training necessary to meet wartime goals. I am also a Platoon Sergeant who is directly in charge of 43 soldiers and their areas of responsibilities. I stay very busy to say the least.

I have my daughter Tresslyn who is three and my son Gibson who is five. My wife, Tiffany and I have been married for nine years going on ten here in a couple of months. I have been in the Army for fourteen years now.

If you have a desire to play with multimillion-dollar equipment and support your country it is a great career.

I have enclosed a DVD of some clips you can show if you would like. I have not seen them all yet so you may want to preview them first. I have also enclosed some photos on DVD for the class. There are also some stickers for the class. I appreciate everyone sending me letters they are a pleasant reminder of the home front. We have seen the most combat as an aviation rotation with our Task Force Storm. Delta Company 113th Aviation, which is our unit, has had every aircraft take fire, two helicopters destroyed, five lives lost and about a dozen injured. It has been a long year but the Taliban and Alquida presence has been dramatically reduced since our units have smoked them out of hiding. Now we can see kids the same age as the kids in your class play and smile because they are not worried about being hurt. It is nice to know what we have accomplished is appreciated. Thanks again to you and all your students who took the time to send letters.

SFC David McCurry

Dear Mr. McCurry,

My name is Jarius Trae Hines and I am 11 years old, and a very good sports player. I am in the sixth grade and I am 4ft. 6.

When I get older I am going to be a Marine or in the Air Force. If you know Lamar Howard he is a police at the Tennessee base, and he is my uncle. What kind of gun do you use to shoot with? Have you ever gotten injured? Have you ever been captured?

Sincerely,

Trae Hines

Dear Mr. Hines,

Just to let you know I carry a pistol in my leg holster every day, everywhere I go. Sometimes I carry a M4 or M16 machine gun when I need more protection. I shoot best with my pistol though. You said you were going to go into the Marines or the Air Force. I would go into the Air Force since they fly everywhere so you do not have to walk as much. Plus, they always have a nice place to eat and sleep. The Marines are way tougher though. I have never been captured in my career. I have almost been shot twice in my career in training. I have been shot at when I was in Bosnia, but they never hit me. I have stepped on two land mines in my career and lucky for me they did not go off. Thank you for sending me a letter.

SFC David McCurry

Dear Mr. McCurry,

Hi, my name is Brannon Martin. I'm in 6th grade at Summerville Middle School (SMS). I am 11 years old. How is it over there? What is the biggest helicopter you have ever worked on? Do you have to carry a weapon on you? Have you ever fought in the war? Thank you and all the other soldiers over there. Remember you will always be appreciated.

Your friend,

Brannon Martin

Dear Brannon,

It is hot over here already. Winter lasted about a month or two and then it started to get really hot again. The biggest helicopter I have worked on is a CH-47D Chinook Helicopter. This helicopter is 18 ½ feet tall, 51 feet long, with a 21 foot wheel base and the blades from front to rear overlap spanning 99 feet long. I have worked on every type of helicopter that the Army has and the CH-47D is the biggest. It also is the fastest helicopter the Army has. It is even faster than the Apache Gunship. If you have a pickup trick it has around 300 horsepower where as our helicopters have 10,000 horsepower and can lift a combined weight of 50,000 pounds. That is a lot of weight. I carry a pistol with me at all times, but I have not had to shoot any bad guys. Thank you for remembering me and all my soldiers.

SFC David McCurry

Dear Mr. McCurry,

Hi, my name is Amanda (as you can tell) and I am 12 years old. I am in the 6th grade and in the Summerville Middle School. I think having war is wrong but it's a fight for our country to make peace with others. Now I have only a few questions for you!

Is it hard being in the Army?

Do you have to carry a weapon with you all the time?

Are you ever a lookout at night?

Why did you go to fight for the war? Who inspired you?

Yours truly,

Amanda Gonzalez

P.S. When I say the Pledge, I think of all them men and women sacrificing their lives for us and I am so glad to live in a country where peace means everything.

Dear Amanda,

Sometimes it is hard to be in the Army. It can be hard to be in any job when things are going bad, but I love what I do. We save lives everyday and we capture the bad guys. I do carry a weapon with me at all times. I carry a pistol with me and sometimes I carry a machine

continued page 2

Heppner hospital may be able to accommodate long-term care program

Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner may be one of two hospitals in the state allowed to designate a number of its beds for long term care purposes if a proposed Oregon Administrative Rule change is granted, hospital Administrator Victor Vander Does explained. The amendment is an effort to increase access to long-term care services in rural areas of the state that don't have a licensed nursing care facility within a 30-mile radius of their area's Critical Access Hospital.

According to a Department of Human Services, Seniors and People with Disabilities Statement of Need and Fiscal Impact, Morrow and Harney County hospitals currently meet the criteria. Pioneer Memorial had operated a nursing home for many years until heavy losses forced its closure in November 2003.

The proposal would amend the Medicaid Nursing Facilities Rule regarding Medicaid payments to qualified hospitals. "When we had the nursing home, the Medicaid reimbursement rates were so much lower than our operating costs that it created a deficit that was impossible to overcome," Vander Does explained. "This change would be a win-win situation. It would allow us to fill a large need for residents in the local area while receiving a reimbursement rate that's in line with our costs," Vander Does said. The change would have no fiscal impact on the state, as, "the effect of the rule is simply to allow Medicaid nursing facility payments to be made to certain Critical Access Hospitals rather than to nursing facilities," the Statement of Need and Fiscal Impact says. If the change is granted, Pioneer Memorial will begin renovations to add up to10 beds on the hospital's main floor to accommodate the long-term program.

Vander Does was part of a group who began seeking a resolution to rural Oregon's long-term care needs two years ago. Last year Vander Does and other members of the group testified before a House subcommittee regarding the issue. A public hearing regarding the proposal will be held in Salem on February 22. Written comments can be submitted until Friday, February 23, 2007, by e-mail to Christina.Hartman@state.or.us, faxed to (503) 947-4245, or mailed to Rule Coordinator, DHS, Seniors and People with Disabilities Division, 500 Summer Street NE, E-10, Salem, OR 97301-1074.

Vander Does said he expects to know whether the proposal has been granted by the end of March or first part of April.

Local teacher asked to teach class at Oregon Writing Festival

On Saturday, April 21, Janie Allen, a teacher at Heppner Elementary School, has been asked to teach a writing lesson at the Oregon Writing Festival at Portland State University. She will be teaching the class entitled "Follow the Path" to fourth and fifth graders.

Allen plans to tell about Heppner being Oregon's Irish Capital and will give each student a map of Ireland, a rock with a shamrock on it, and the words "follow the path." The students will then write an adventure story about a trip to Ireland, finding the rock, and what the "path" offers.

About 600-700 young writers from Oregon and Southwest Washington will be there for classes, and to share their writings. Well-known authors of children's literature will be serving as keynote speakers.

Allen has served as a chaperone for several years with Morrow County students and is very excited about the opportunity to teach a class this year.

Janie Allen

Wrestling comes to Heppner High

See page 10 for more photos

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:

MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

At the MCGG GREEN FEED STORE in Heppner:

WINTER CLEARANCE SALE:
ALL KEY INSULATED CLOTHING AND WINTER BOOTS: 15% OFF
Stock Tank Heaters and De-icers: 15% OFF
Heated Buckets and Pet Bowls: 15% OFF

New Items!
Georgia Boots...
Check It Out!

Morrow County Grain Growers Green Feed & Seed
242 W. Linden Way, Heppner • 676-9422 • 989-8221 (MCGG main office)