



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Kyle Homer put up a display of 50 white crosses at his Hermiston home, to honor those he served with in Iraq who died in service.

Fifty crosses for fallen comrades

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Seven years after he left Iraq, Kyle Homer found a way to help others remember those who didn't make it home.

Homer and Jonathan Wheeler put up a memorial in Homer's front yard that honors 50 of the men they served with who died in Iraq. The small white crosses are displayed in a grid on the front lawn at the home on the 800 block of East Pine Avenue in Hermiston, and each cross bears the name of a Marine who died in action.

Homer said all the people named in the memorial served in 1st Battalion 3rd Marines. Twenty-six of them died in a helicopter in February 2005, and the rest died in combat in Fallujah.

"These are our brothers," said Wheeler, who lives in Walla Walla. "I think about these guys every day. Today is just a good day to share their stories with other people."

He remembered the story of one fellow Marine, Sgt. Rafael Peralta, who was up for the Medal of Honor, and received the Navy Cross, which is awarded for bravery in combat. Homer recalled that Peralta dove on a grenade while their battalion was clearing out buildings in downtown Fallujah.

Homer said he put the dis-

play up on Friday so it would be visible all weekend. He said many people have stopped by, with a family driving down from Walla Walla just to see the display.

Homer said none of the families of those named in the memorial stopped by, as most of them are scattered around the country. He and Wheeler don't keep in touch with many of the family members of those in their battalion who died. But the ones who survived, he said, have an annual reunion.

Homer said he will take the display down at the end of Memorial Day, but because of positive reactions from his neighbors and others who saw the display, he is thinking about making it an annual project.

"It's kind of quiet patriotism," he said. "I don't want to shove it down anybody's throat, but just honor the guys that mean a lot to me."

Wheeler served from 2001 to 2005, and Homer from 2003 to 2011. They were in the same vehicle in Iraq at one point, Wheeler said.

"This is just my way of honoring them," Homer said. "If we don't tell their stories, nobody will."

The Iraq war began in 2003 and ended in 2011. Close to 5,000 American soldiers were estimated to have been killed, as well as hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Ceremony honors 38 veterans who died in the past year



STAFF PHOTOS BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Members of the U.S. Army Honor Guard during the Memorial Day service at Hermiston Cemetery.



Members of the VFW and American Legion stand as they salute the flag during the Memorial Day Ceremony at Hermiston Cemetery.



Families and friends gather at the Hermiston Cemetery to honor those who died in service on Memorial Day. For more photos of the event, see A15.

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Memorial Day ceremonies in Hermiston and Pendleton took a moment Monday to remember casualties of war and the more recent passing of veterans who served their country.

Hermiston's ceremony, hosted by VFW Post 4750, stuck to tradition, with Commander Ron Jardine reading out the names of 38 Umatilla County veterans who had died in the past year.

About 100 gathered at the gravesite for the brief ceremony, which honored veterans from all branches of the military.

Chaplain Tom Reamer also gave a short speech about what veterans mean to the United States.

"Veterans write a blank check to the United States of America, of an amount up to, and including, their

life," he said.

Reamer also highlighted a tradition for many veterans — placing coins on gravestones.

A penny means that someone visited the deceased. A veteran who trained with the deceased at boot camp can place a nickel on the grave. A dime means the veteran and the deceased served together.

"And a quarter," he said. "Means the veteran was with the deceased when they were killed."

Jardine noted that June Spearman, a gold star mother, was at the grave that day. Spearman's son, Staff Sgt. Gordon Keith Spearman Jr., was in the Army and died on March 10, 1971 in Vietnam. He was 24 and on his second combat tour in Vietnam when he was killed by small arms fire in the Binh Dinh province.

Across Umatilla County, VFW Post 922 held a similar ceremony

at Pendleton's Olney Cemetery, seeking respite from the late morning sun by conducting most of the proceedings under the shade of some trees.

Among a series of short speeches and prayers, pastor Chris Clemons said monuments have acted as a way to pass on stories and legacies since ancient times.

Gravesites are no different, Clemons said, especially those belonging to veterans.

"The story of stone," as Clemons referred to it, was told throughout Olney Cemetery.

On Memorial Day, American flags were placed on each headstone where a veteran was interred, spanning World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and other conflicts.

Antonio Sierra contributed to this story.

Bryan Wolfe powers on with community service

HERMISTON HERALD

Bryan Wolfe was recently recognized with the Northwest Public Power Association's top honor for community service.

The Hermiston man, who is a longtime member of the Umatilla Electric Cooperative board of directors, was honored with the Paul J. Raver Community Service Award. Wolfe received the award May 22 at the NWP-PA's annual conference in Boise, Idaho.

The award honors an individual or company who has demonstrated superior leadership in the betterment of cities, states or regions.

It was first presented to Paul J. Raver (posthumously) on April 18, 1963. Raver was one of the first leaders of Bonneville Power Administration and later served as superintendent of Seattle City Light.

Wolfe, a rancher and farmer, was cited for championing his city, state and region through 40-plus years of volunteer service. In the public power industry, Wolfe has served on local (UEC), state (Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association) and national (National Rural Electric Cooperative) boards of directors.

Three Oregon governors, in three separate decades, have recognized Wolfe's leadership by appointing him to the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council, the Hanford Cleanup Board and the Oregon Board of Forestry.



Bryan Wolfe

His alma mater, Oregon State University, named him to its Agricultural Hall of Fame. Most tellingly, the people who know him best — his friends, neighbors and colleagues — honored Wolfe as Hermiston's Man of the Year in 1999.

NWPPA is an international association representing and serving about 150 customer-owned, locally controlled utilities in the western United States and Canada.

The association also serves approximately 300 associate members across the nation and Canada who are allied with the electric utility industry.

For more information, contact Steve Meyers, UEC member services administrator, at 541-289-1344 or steve.meyers@umatillaelectric.com.

BRIEFS

Benefit event to help HHS sophomore

People have a chance to win some great items as well as helping a local family in need.

Jasmine Ellwood, daughter of Hermiston police officer Mike Ellwood, was recently diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma. Money is being raised to help the family with expenses related to her cancer treatments. Jasmine is a sophomore at Hermiston High School.

The benefit dinner and auction is Saturday, June 2 from 5-9 p.m. in the commons at Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St. The silent auction ends at 6:45 p.m. and the live auction starts at 7:30 p.m. The cost is \$15 per person or \$40 for a family of four (with an additional \$5 per child).

Items up for bid include an a walleye fishing trip courtesy of Angling Oregon, a 2-night stay for two with several rounds of golf at Silvie's Ranch, a hunting rifle, jewelry and more. Also, there will be a raffle for a Yeti Cooler.

In addition, people can donate through www.gofundme.com/ellwood-medical-fund.

Aaron Johnson to intern at Hermiston Nazarene

A new ministry intern was introduced May 27 at Hermiston Church of the Nazarene.

Aaron Johnson, who attended West Park Elementary School, the

church's "adopted school," has served as a police officer in Stanfield and Pendleton. In addition, he was deployed twice to Iraq with the Oregon National Guard. Johnson is currently an instructor contracted by the National Guard to train staff officers in military intelligence decision making.

Johnson and his wife, Sarah, live in Umatilla with their dog, Bella. He is taking seminary classes at Liberty University. At Hermiston Nazarene, he will serve as director of Life Groups with some teaching and preaching.

Hermiston Church of the Nazarene is located at 1520 W. Orchard Ave. For more information, contact 541-567-3677, hermistonnaz@gmail.com or visit www.hermistonnazarene.org.

HHS volleyball team digs upcoming fundraiser

The Hermiston High School volleyball team will cruise with a promotion sponsored by the Ford Motor Company.

The fundraising event invites qualified drivers to take a short test drive. Ford will donate \$20 — up to \$6,000 in total — that will go to help support the HHS volleyball team.

Drive 4 UR School is Saturday, June 2 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the parking lot at Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St. Also, volunteers from HHS will provide free drinks and hot dogs for everyone who takes a test drive.

In addition, a bouncy house will be available for kids and representatives from PAWS will be on hand for a pet adoption event.

For more information, contact Maria Duron at 541-667-6036 or maria.duron@hermistonnsd.org.

Volunteers needed to help drive CareVan program

People looking to give back to the community are invited to volunteer with the CareVan.

A medical transportation service operated through Good Shepherd Health Care System, the program is especially in need of volunteer drivers.

People who enjoy meeting new people and making a difference are encouraged to contact Cindy Schaan at 541-667-3690 or cschaan@gshealth.org.

Presbyterian church hosts secondhand sale

People can shop for a variety of items, including clothing, toys, puzzles and lots of treasures to be found at the white elephant table.

The annual Second Hand Sale is Friday, June 1 and Saturday, June 2 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Umatilla Presbyterian Church, 14 Martin Drive, Umatilla.

The event is organized by the Women's Association of the Umatilla Presbyterian Church.

For more information, call 541-922-3250.