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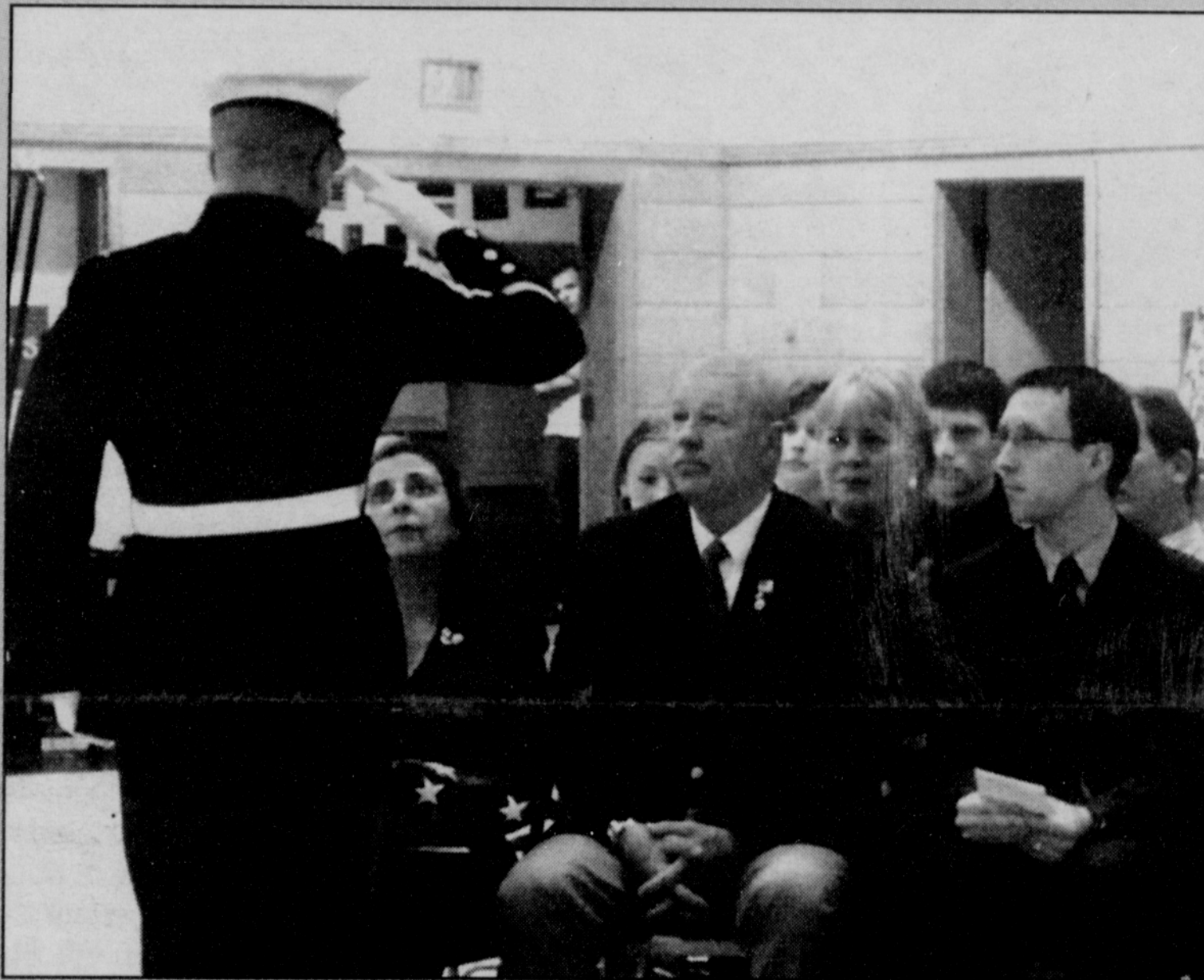
The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

March 18, 2004

His sacrifice is remembered...



The family of Erik Kesterson receives a salute after being presented with a flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol in his memory. Seated in the front row are M.J. Kesterson, Clay Kesterson and Tim Mahalak.

The community gathered at Vernonia High School on March 10, to honor the memory of Erik C. Kesterson, who lost his life November 15, 2003, when two Black Hawk helicopters collided in Iraq. Erik, who honorably met his goal of serving in the military with both the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Army, would have been 30 years old on the day of the assembly.

The Colors were presented by the National Guard and letters were read from Governor Ted Kulongoski, Congressman David Wu, and Representative Betsy Johnson. Senator Joan Dukes spoke, along with members of Erik's family, teachers, and friends.

Tim Mahalak, Kesterson's half-brother, talked about his brother's heroism, relating how, in September of 2000, Kesterson was in a helicopter that crashed on landing and started to burn. Erik was the first one out but, instead of moving out of harm's way, he pulled seven others out of the helicopter to safety. He was awarded the Marine Corps Medal of Heroism for his actions that day but

"...was very humble about it," said Mahalak.

Kesterson's mother, M.J., presented a plaque and a sign to the school. The sign said, in part: "We talk about the freedoms we have... We obtained these freedoms through the unity and might of our military; but they are not free. They were bought with a price and are kept with a price... Visit Arlington National Cemetery and other cemeteries... They all paid the price, the ultimate price."

She also presented a plaque to Sharon Williams, one of her son's favorite teachers at Vernonia High School, for "having faith in Erik and giving him a break," by allowing him to pass her class and graduate so he could go into the service.

Mayor Cindy Ball brought a memorial gift from the City of Vernonia—an American flag which had been flown over the nation's capitol in memory of Erik. A member of the U.S. Marine Corps presented the flag to the Kesterson family – father Clay, mother M.J. and brother Tim.

9-1-1 District again earns national award for fiscal excellence

Columbia County taxpayers have a lot of reasons to be happy with the operation of their 9-1-1 emergency dispatching district.

When voters formed the district, its outmoded equipment couldn't be replaced because their cramped work area in the basement of the county courthouse was too small to hold new computer consoles.

Over the years, a fiscally responsible administration and board of directors have worked hard to develop a service that is now recognized throughout the state for its competence and professionalism.

By the help of grants to stretch available funds, the district now serves county residents from a district-owned building with the most modern equipment available, including microwave communications in areas previously unreachable because of "blind" spots.

In spite of all that, the district's latest honor has nothing to do with dispatching or communications...it's about budgeting.

For the second year in a row, Columbia 9-1-1 Communications District has received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA).

The award, which recognizes excellence in governmental budgeting, specifically recognizes Administrative Services Manager Nancy Edwards and Office Support Specialist Kathy Simek. Columbia 9-1-1 is one of only 45 entities and managers (out of 14,000) in the U.S. and Canada to earn this

recognition.

The district was chosen after examination by a panel of independent experts to determine if its budget met program criteria in four areas – as a policy document, an operations guide, a financial plan and a communications device.

"This award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting [and] represents a significant achievement by your organization," wrote Stephen Gaughier, GFOA's Director of Technical Services, in the letter announcing the award.

Columbia 9-1-1 Communications District provides emergency communications for all of Columbia County. It is also the coordinator and dispatcher for 16 public safety agencies in the county, as well as the Oregon State Police and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Preliminary okay for vendor at lake

Vernonia City Council granted preliminary approval, at their March 15 meeting, to Larry and Gail Snethen to operate a food and bait concession at Vernonia Lake.

The Snethens have agreed to install a moveable concession trailer at the lake. A city franchise fee of five percent of net proceeds will apply to the operation, which also requires approval by the Columbia County sanitarian and the Vernonia Parks Commission.

Approval was also granted to the Cowboy Mounted Shooting Association to hold another

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