



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Stacy Wolf, of Oakley, co-coordinator of the Northwest Kansas Military Family Support Group spoke during its first meeting Saturday at the Colby Kansas National Guard Armory. The group's purpose is to lend support to deployed Guard members and other members of the military and their families.

## Support group forms to aid troops, families

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Northwest Kansas Military Family Support Group held its first meeting Saturday at the Kansas National Guard Armory in Colby. The group is the brainchild of coordinator Lisa Varney of Goodland and co-coordinator Stacy Wolf of Oakley.

The group was Varney's idea and she and Wolf decided to go forward with it when they met at a support group meeting several months ago. Both of their husbands are Guardsmen serving on active duty in Kuwait and Iraq.

"It is open to anyone who wants to come," Varney said. "It will be based from the National Guard though."

The group will meet the second Saturday of each month at the Colby armory, Varney said, and also said they had a decent turnout for the first meeting with about a dozen people.

The focus of the group is to provide support to family and friends at home and soldiers abroad.

Goals include sending care packages, fund raising, a Christmas party and a welcome home party for the soldiers when they return. They would also like to get civic groups and the community as a whole involved.

Everyone had the chance to stand up and talk about their deployed family members (at the first meeting) — how and when they found out they were getting sent overseas.

They outlined their group plans and also went over a list of things each soldier's family can do to lend them support while they are so far from home.

Wolf suggested several ways for families to keep in touch, including sending a journal back and forth through the mail and sending a "soldier support album" with pictures and messages from family and friends.

There are also a couple of hi-tech ways to keep in communication. She said using the Internet and MSN Messenger is one way and offers free e-mail and instant messaging.

Phone cards, subscriptions to their local newspaper and home videos were other suggestions.

Wolf said she sent her husband Brian a digital camera and said it's a good idea because he'll be able to take pictures and download them to the Internet. She said that way their family can see what he's been up to and the people he meets.

For more detailed information, call Varney at (785) 890-6939.

## Christian writers to gather

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Christian writers will have an opportunity to share their talents and learn more about their art at an upcoming event in Colorado.

Jerry B. Jenkins, author of the Left Behind series and owner of the Christian Writer's Guild, will conduct the third Writing for the Soul conference at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs from Feb. 17 to 20.

Some 300 people from 40 states are expected to attend the conference which features Jenkins, bestselling authors Angela Hunt and

Stephen Bly, Moody Bible Institute's president, Dr. Joseph Stowell, and worship leader Randall Atcheson, a Juilliard-trained pianist and Carnegie Hall performer.

The writer's conference will help beginning and experienced writers, and for four days they will hear a variety of speakers and attend some of 24 workshops designed to develop their craft.

Registrants will have the opportunity to share their manuscripts, chapters and ideas face-to-face with leading publishers.

# District Judge hands down sentences

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

The man arrested for an early morning break-in at a south Colby strip mall in December was sentenced in Thomas County District Court on Wednesday.

Raymond Orville Brown, 67, Sacramento, Calif., pleaded guilty to felony criminal damage to property for multiple break-ins at Southwind Plaza during the early morning hours of Dec. 6.

He pleaded guilty at a previous court appearance on Dec. 20, and his attorney, Cal Williams, Colby, told District Judge Glenn Schiffner Brown is now a resident of Ohio and would like his sentence to be fulfilled in that state.

Schiffner sentenced Brown to a 12-month probation and 12-month post release supervision with an underlying prison sentence of six months should he violate the probation.

Brown was also ordered to pay a total of \$4,017 dollars in restitution to Fotogirl Photography, Out West Western Store, Southwind Plaza and Taylor Motors for damage sustained during the break-ins.

In addition to the restitution, Brown must follow standard orders of probation, such as not bearing firearms and submitting blood or saliva samples to the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

Also sentenced on Wednesday was Kyle Brogan, who pleaded

guilty on Dec. 29, to felony driving while under the influence of alcohol on Sept. 2.

Schiffner ordered him to the custody of the Thomas County Sheriff's office for a term of 365 days, and ordered him to pay fines and fees of \$1,702 dollars.

Brogan, a public works employee for the city of Colby, was placed on a supervised work release program. He will work during the day and after spending a total of 90 nights in jail will be placed on unsupervised probation for the balance of the 1-year sentence.

Having already served 48 hours in jail, Brogan will complete the balance of the term and, like Brown, was ordered to other standard pro-

bation terms. Williams told Schiffner Brogan's job supervisor had asked him to thank the court for agreeing to the work release program "because it allowed the city to go on with its duties."

Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick agreed to both men's sentences and was present in court.

Wyrick asked Schiffner to order a supervised work release program for Robert Gray, Jr., on probation for criminal discharge of a firearm and felony damage to property.

She told the judge Gray has violated the terms of his probation and absconded from the area and his whereabouts are unknown.

The next Thomas County motion day is scheduled for March 9.

## Kansas Marine stripped of Purple Heart

ATCHISON (AP) — Nearly two years ago, Marine Cpl. Travis Eichelberger watched as his commandant pinned a Purple Heart to his hospital gown at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Now the same commandant, Gen. William Nyland, is revoking that medal and removing it from Eichelberger's record because he was run over by a tank driven by an American.

Eichelberger, 22, of Atchison, is one of 11 Marines who have received "letters of error" within the past two months telling them that they were given their medals by mistake.

Nyland said it was necessary to revoke Eichelberger's medal because his injuries weren't "caused directly or indirectly by enemy action."

"I'm disappointed," Eichelberger said Tuesday. "I don't understand how a mistake like that could happen."

Eichelberger was sleeping in a shallow foxhole in the sand of Iraq when he was run over by a 67-ton

Abrams tank. It was mid-March 2003 after he and the rest of the 200 Marines in his unit crossed into Iraq from Kuwait on their way to Baghdad.

"I laid there and saw my pants and other clothes twisted (around my body)," Eichelberger told *The Topeka Capital-Journal* in March 2004. "I didn't feel severe pain. I was in shock. I was paralyzed from the chest down and started dragging myself on my hands."

He suffered a crushed pelvis, shredded internal organs and legs that were swollen to twice their normal size.

After being dismissed from the hospital, he came home to a hero's welcome, complete with an outpouring of support from his community and extensive media coverage. But now that his medal has been revoked, he said, he feels kind of awkward.

"I got injured, my hometown rallied behind me and helped out my family," he said. "To have (the Purple Heart) taken away, it makes you feel like you're a liar."

Charles Mugno, head of the Marine Corps Awards Branch, said the 11 injured Marines were among the first wave of casualties to return from Iraq and there was a rush to honor them.

Mugno said the Purple Heart er-

rors were caused by confusion over the circumstances of how the Marines were injured, adding that there's a difference between being wounded in a combat zone and being wounded by hostile action.

Officials said they had to revoke the medals after they realized the mistake.

"The most important point is that the revocation was the right thing to do in order to maintain the sanctity and the specialness of the award," Marine spokesman Lt. Col. T.V. Johnson said. "You don't want to be identified as someone wearing their medals incorrectly, or worse, wear-

ing something you don't deserve."

Eichelberger said, "If I really don't deserve it, I don't want it. But the problem is that they (military commanders) decided to give them to us. ... Get it right next time."

Eichelberger will receive a medical discharge from the Marines later this month. While he doesn't want people to think he's complaining about losing his medal, he doesn't want any other soldiers to be put in a position of explaining why they've been stripped of a military honor.

"What am I supposed to tell my town?" he said.

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