



You can't say no to the color comics



Too much to do in USA Weekend



Gymnast makes things difficult for herself

Lebanon veteran gets belated honor

BY CAROLYN SPANER
Albany Democrat-Herald

LEBANON — Nearly 53 years ago, Albert Gasser stood beside his brother Edward as their Marine Corps platoon fought against Japanese dive bombers during World War II.

The citation says, "The brothers and other survivors of the 1st Platoon, 1st Special Weapons Battalion, British Solomon Islands, on Sept. 25, 1943, displayed outstanding courage under enemy fire and vicious dive bombing attacks by enemy aircraft."

Although the recognition is late, it's not too late, said Gasser, 75.

"In 1993 we went to our birth records in Wisconsin and learned that our then-Lt. Longmeyer was trying to get this all together," Gasser said. The recognition continued to be delayed because some records were lost and the Pentagon wasn't responding to the request.

"During landing operations on the Japanese-held island of Vella Lavella, British Solomon Islands, on Sept. 25, 1943, they displayed outstanding courage under enemy fire and vicious dive bombing attacks by enemy aircraft. Despite the fact that bombing raids were made on two of our guns, you and the entire 1st Platoon, without regard for your own personal safety, continued to give effective battle to the enemy."

The commendation then credits the platoon for destroying five enemy aircraft and helping to capture the steeply-held island of Vella Lavella, that led to securing another island, Bougainville.

In October 1943, Maj. Donald Schumack, a task force commander recommended the platoon for a unit citation. It was then approved by the commanding general of the Marine Corps the following year.

By then, the surviving members of the platoon's battalion had disbanded. They were reassigned to make up for the heavy casualties and lost for experienced soldiers elsewhere.

The citation never was officially sent — until last month.

Gasser is currently the Scottia commander for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in Linn and Benton counties; program chairman for the Lebanon chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons; and chairman of Seniors and Law Enforcement Together in Lebanon.

He is also a member of the advisory council for senior services for the county of government and a member of the community relations committee for Lebanon Community Hospital.

He was an Oregon State Police officer for 18 years, and also a mobile home dealer and insurance agent.

He and his wife, Maxine, have been married nearly 43 years. They have two children and four grandchildren.

Brother Edward lives in Beaverton.

right there, hanging on her man's shoulder, setting the table or whatever."

Channie's purse, makeup, and favorite clothes were still in her room when she disappeared. If she'd run away, Serdy said, she'd have taken all that with her.

"She disappeared like a piece of snow on a 90-degree day," Serdy said. "No trace. No nothing."

Serdy and her family and the Linn County sheriff's department who investigated the disappearance believe the girl is dead. Police have questioned Akroyd many times about her. He has consistently denied knowing where she is.

"We miss her a lot," Serdy said. "We think about her every day. There's always that little hope that she's alive out there somewhere."

Channie often wore a leather bracelet with metal studs. She left it at Serdy's house when they left for the family reunion. Serdy found it there after her niece disappeared. She still carries it in her purse.

The Linn County investigation into Rachanda's disappearance turned up new evidence that led to indictments in 1993 in the 1978 murder of Kaye Joan Turner of Eugene.

Akroyd, who was single then and living in a mobile home at Sestram Junction, was the last person who reported seeing Turner alive, and judging near Camp Sherman. Eight months later, he found her skeletal remains in the woods a few miles away.

Akroyd was convicted in January 1994 of five counts of aggravated murder and three counts of murder in connection with Turner's death. He is serving five life sentences and is not eligible for parole.

Linda Akroyd has moved to California since her daughter disappeared. Steve Pickle, Channie's father, lives in White Oak.

The girl's brother Bryan, age 26, lives off and on with Serdy in Lower House. Channie has paternal grandparents in Street House, maternal grandparents in southern Oregon, two aunts, two uncles and several cousins.

"Everything's hanging in limbo," Serdy said. "If we could find her remains, we could say our final goodbye, but at this point, we don't have anything."

"We will think about her. We will search for her. We just don't want people to forget that she's gone."

Police find gun in room of suspect

CORVALLIS (AP) — A ball for an Oregon State University student charged with racial intimidation was increased Friday after police found a loaded gun in his dormitory room.

Oregon State Police troopers, acting with the permission of university officials, recovered a .38 caliber revolver from the room of Eric Hutchinson shortly before noon, said Lt. Bernie Cline, state police spokesman.

"We are generally concerned that there was a loaded firearm on campus," Cline said, "especially in this case."

Hutchinson, 21, was arrested Wednesday at his dormitory room as an angry crowd of students banged on his door.

Observers observed when police officers took Hutchinson into custody.

Cline said troopers returned to the room Friday after another student claimed Hutchinson had threatened to kill a witness against him.

Hutchinson remained at the Benton County Jail Friday. Bail was set at \$10,000 at the request of district attorney's office.

Bail had been set at \$10,000 when Hutchinson was arrested Wednesday.

Hutchinson and Christopher Curry, both white, are accused of taunting a black student with racial epithets, and of trying to restrain and spit on him from a dormitory balcony.

Both Hutchinson and Curry were indicted Wednesday by a Benton County grand jury on attempted intimidation charges. Curry, 30, was free on \$10,000 bail.

Six years later, search for daughter continues



JoAnn Serdy said she thinks of her missing niece Channie every day.

Relatives of Rachanda Pickle hold out little hope that she still lives. Either way, they would like to put the disappearance — and some painful memories — to rest.

BY MARILYN MONTGOMERY
Albany Democrat-Herald

If Rachanda Lee Pickle is alive, she's 18 years old now. Her birthday was Friday.

Although her family would like to believe she is alive, they don't, really. The petite, brown-eyed girl may be 13 however, her aunt says.

The girl her family calls Channie or Chan vanished on July 11, 1990. She was living then with her mother and stepfather, Linda and John Akroyd, at the state Highway Division maintenance yard at Sestram Junction, where John Akroyd worked.

Linda Akroyd was at work that Tuesday morning. John Akroyd said police had seen the girl, watching her sit in her pajamas, at 11 a.m.

Akroyd said he went to Rachanda out in the woods to take pictures of her.

Rachanda was gone when he returned. Her mother reported her missing the next day.

Channie had spent the week before that with her father, Steve Pickle, and his family at a reunion at the coast, said her aunt John body of Lower House.

"It was camping, clam digging, fishing, the whole nine yards," Serdy said last week. "We came back on Friday. Linda picked her up on Sunday. Tuesday morning, she was gone."

Serdy said she has never believed her niece ran away from home.

"That was never a possibility," she said. "Never."

Serdy was terrified of the duck, and was extremely close to her mother, her aunt said.

"We could almost get your clock by her," Serdy said. "Within 10 minutes of her mom getting home from work, she'd be

Oregon welfare-reform expansion approved

BY CHARLES E. BRIGGS
Associated Press Writer

SALZM (AP) — The federal government's welfare agency has agreed to let Oregon expand a pilot job-training program that puts welfare recipients to work, Gov. John Kitzhaber announced Friday.

The Health and Human Services Department agreed to waive conventional regulations on the state case under the JOBS Plus program, now operating as a pilot project in six counties, to operate statewide.

So far, the welfare recipients have found jobs, and about 25 have been placed in permanent positions.

The former welfare clients are guaranteed child care assistance, health care and at least as much to come as they get from welfare.

"Oregon has clearly demonstrated its ability to fulfill its commitment to achieve specific outcomes," Kitzhaber said. "We have reduced our welfare rolls two years in a row by moving people from welfare to work and anticipate another 25 percent reduction over the next two years."

Aid to families with dependent children, the largest welfare program, has declined from about \$1.80 billion in June 1993 to \$1.60 billion last June.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., gave the waiver effort a big boost as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He amended a major budget bill to include a provision approving the Oregon plan unless the federal agency agreed to it first.

JOBS Plus originated as an initiative measure passed by voters. But there was opposition to such provisions as requiring people to work for less than the legal minimum wage. The final version of the program was the result of several years of negotiation and revision.

Welfare recipients are selected randomly to participate in the program, which lasts six months.

The other JOBS program is an employment training program in which all new adult welfare recipients will be required to participate unless they have a good reason to be exempted.

Families who do not cooperate with the employment training program can lose some or all of their welfare grants.

Current JOBS Plus counties are Clackamas, Baker, Gilliam, Linn, Colby, Multnomah and Washington.

'We have reduced our welfare rolls two years in a row by moving people from welfare to work.'

Gov. John Kitzhaber

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Sports: The Arizona Wildcats avoided a first-round NCAA season in a big win, whipping outpunched Valparaiso, 81.

Highway 20 reopens to traffic

Highway 20 east of Cascade has reopened after being closed for more than a month.

The Oregon Department of Transportation removed barricades Friday, allowing traffic to travel uncongested from Albany to Bend.

The road was blocked to travelers after a number of mudslides were discovered following last month's heavy rains. Mudslides could get as far as the Mountain House Restaurant at Upper Sals east of Cascade.