

The Community Page



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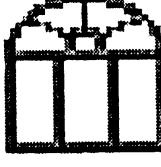
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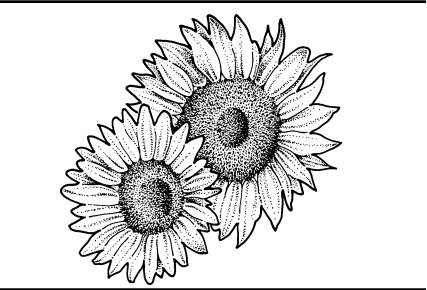
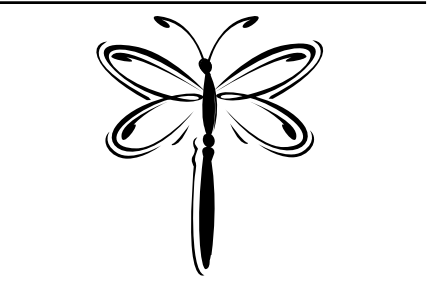
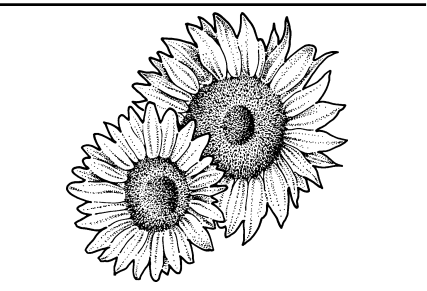
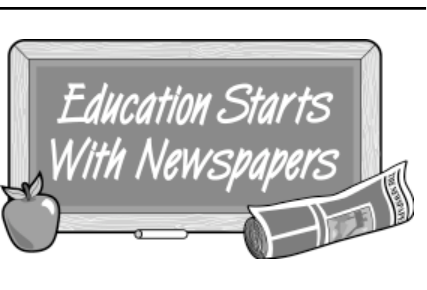
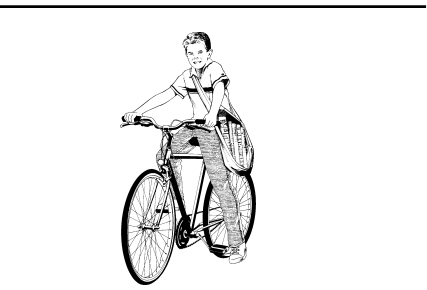
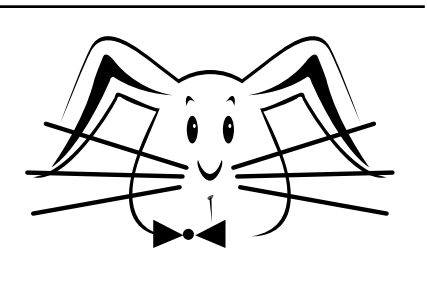
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Walt Linthacum, special deputy to the grand exalted ruler for the state of Kansas, gave the Elks tribute to the flag at a ceremony at the Goodland Elks Lodge honoring servicemen's families. Photos by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

Goodland Elks Lodge honors military servicemen's families with historic Blue Star Banner

by Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News

The Goodland Elks Lodge has handed out over 100 Blue Star Banners in five years honoring families who have members serving in the military.

The lodge presented 18 banners this year, bringing to total to 102. In the first four years, said Zona Price, lodge secretary, they had given out 84.

About 45 people attended the fifth Blue Star Banner program Sunday, Dec. 3, at the lodge.

Members of the 170th Maintenance Company of the Kansas Army National Guard presented the colors. Ron Barkley, Elks Americanism chairman, welcomed the audience and Walt Linthacum, special deputy to the grand exalted ruler for the state of Kansas, was master of ceremonies and gave the Elks tribute to the flag.

Kay Melia, KLOE radio personality, spoke, saying he was proud of the efforts of Price and the Elks to honor those who are serving their country.

Melia talked about an interview he did with his granddaughter, Kelsey, of Conifer, Colo., after her teacher gave the students an assignment to interview a veteran before Veterans Day.

Melia said he told his granddaughter he served as a cryptographer with the 25th Infantry Signal Corps and was in Korea for 15 months during the Korean War.

"I was never in direct contact with the enemy," he said, "but I could hear the shells at times a few miles away."

He said Kelsey wanted to know what the morale of the troops was, and he said they wanted to go home.

"I think we all wanted to go home," Melia

said, "but we knew we were serving our country and defending our freedoms."

Kelsey asked him how he was treated — by the public — when he came home from Korea.

"I told her there were no problems," he said, "and that I had a job lined up before I got back."

"I explained that some of the veterans who came home from the Vietnam war were not treated as nicely, and that it was a so-called 'bad war.' I told her all wars are bad, and that Americans always do the best they can."

He said her last question was what it meant to be a veteran.

"I told her there was a joy in the friendships I made," he said, "and that I was proud to have served and that it gave me an appreciation of the freedoms we enjoy."

"I told her to extend a thanks to her teacher. I think it is good to have her understand what it was all about to serve in the military."

Barkley read the names of the service members to receive banners and Exalted Ruler Larry Enfield handed them to the parents and wives who were present.

Banners were presented to:
• Sgt. Randy Fortin of the 170th Maintenance Company, now in New Jersey and preparing to go to Iraq. His wife Melanie, Colby, was present; his parents are Marion and Delores Fortin of Grinnell.
• Staff Sgt. Ernesto Gonzales of the 170th, who recently returned from Iraq, where he was injured. He is in the hospital at Fort Gordon, Ga., for surgery on his injured left arm. His parents are Marcos and Mary Gonzales of Goodland and his children Erika and Alec.

• Spec. Anthony Isenbart, Army Air-

borne, stationed at Fort Bragg, S.C. His parents are Becky and Chuck Crisp of Flagler, Colo., and his grandparents are John and Eleanor Elliott of Edson.

• Pfc. Cody W. Loftin of the 235th Military Police of the Custer, S.D., National Guard, now in Fort Worth preparing for deployment to Afghanistan. His parents are Robert and Linda Loftin of Weskan.

• Chief Warrant Officer 2 William Nathaniel Lydden, Army Aviation, stationed at Fort Lewis, Wash. His wife is Lexi Lydden, and his parents are Danny and Karen Amos. Grandparents are Fern Hawks and Virgil Amos of Goodland.

• Spec. Aaron McClellan of the 170th, serving in Mosul, Iraq. His parents are Chan and Debbie McClellan and grandparents Elna and Francis Carter of Burlington.

• Lance Cpl. Christopher T. Rickman, stationed with the Marines in Iraq. His parents are Robert and Barbara Rickman, and his grandmother is Gloria Gailey of Kanorado.

• Airman 1st Class Jared R. Simmering, stationed at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. His parents are Dan and Angela Simmering of Colby. His grandmothers are Norma Emig and Grace Simmering and his great-grandmother is Helen Denton of Goodland.

Barkley explained the history of the Blue Star Banner, which goes back to World War I. Robert Queissner, a captain in the Army, designed the banner in 1917 for his two sons serving on the front lines in France, Barkley said.

It has become the symbol of having a member of the family in the service.

The banners usually are displayed in the front window of a home. The most stars a banner can have is five. Any more require a second banner



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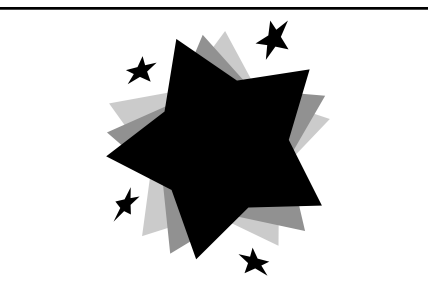
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