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# The News Briefly



## ■ PEACE HAS NO BORDERS

**Festival unites support for vets, military families and war resisters alike**

Months ago, when Bruce Beyer first met Patrick and Jill Hart, he saw parts of himself in them. Almost 40 years after fleeing the country as a Vietnam draft resister, Beyer saw the Harts facing similar challenges as Iraq war resisters trying to claim refugee status in Canada. "They're going through the same kind of stuff that I went through, in terms of adjustments to a new country and new friends and being completely cut off from what you knew all your life," Beyer recalls. He wanted to support them, and the best way he could think of was to unite them with others who'd been affected by the war. To that end, he dreamed up this weekend's Peace Has No Borders festival.

The festival of peace and resistance will bring together those Americans who have arguably been most affected by the war in Iraq—Iraq and Vietnam veterans, family members of soldiers killed in Iraq and the Iraq war resisters living in Canada. Their message to the Bush administration and a seemingly apathetic public: Bring our troops home now.

Peace Has No Borders kicks off Friday night at 7pm with a rally and fundraiser (tickets are \$15) at Kleinhans Music Hall. There will be speakers, including Cindy Sheehan, and musicians gathered to call for an end to the war in Iraq. On Saturday, the festival moves to the Canadian side, at Sugarbowl Park in Fort Erie. There, at noon, the previous night's featured speakers will meet with American war resisters in Canada for a picnic and rally. Both events will feature some of the typical trappings of peace rallies: music, poetry and, of course, solidarity.

Cindy Sheehan is the featured speaker for Peace Has No Borders. She is the 48-year-mother of Army Specialist Casey

A. Sheehan, who was killed in action in Sadr City, Baghdad in April of 2004. After his death, Cindy demanded an audience with George W. Bush in a highly publicized vigil outside his Crawford, Texas ranch. Since her subsequent denial by the president, she has toured with Gold Star Families For Peace, speaking at peace rallies against the legitimacy of the war in Iraq. She's coming to Buffalo thanks to a personal friendship with Lockport native and Iraq Veteran Against the War Geoffrey Millard.

Also noteworthy is the appearance of Stephen T. Banko III, a Buffalo native and New York State's most decorated Vietnam veteran. After returning from 11 months of duty in Vietnam, Banko passionately defended that war, appearing frequently on local radio shows and public access television to debate draft resisters and peace activists, including Beyer's father, Bob. "He was the Mr. Vietnam of Buffalo," Beyer says. Since those days, however, Banko has had a change of heart about war, and he regularly writes essays about Vietnam and the Iraq war for the political newsletter *Counter-Punch*. Peace Has No Borders marks the first time Banko has ever been specifically asked to speak about peace.

Originally the two Peace Has No Borders rallies were going to be literally bridged by a symbolic walk across the Peace Bridge, but several security agencies had different ideas. After meeting with 13 different police agencies—including Homeland Security, the RCMP, FBI, CIA, New York State Police and Buffalo Police—at the Peace Bridge, it became clear that there was no way they were walking across the bridge. According to Colin Eager of the Western New York Peace Center, one legitimate reason was bridge construction. "On the illegitimate side," Eager says, "US Customs is extremely hesitant to let the bridge be used to make any sort of political statement."

In the end, organizers acquiesced to their terms rather than risk having a speaker detained or arrested. Everyone will travel to Fort Erie on his own. "They didn't get what they wanted, though," says Beyer. "They didn't get us to cancel the event."

Beyer suspects that the recent arrest of "so-called" terrorists in Toronto has something to do with the sudden police interest in Peace Has No Borders. Last week, he says, the head of the Buffalo Police Intelligence Squad popped his head in at Beyer's East Side shop to ask how many people were expected at the Fort Erie rally. John Curr from the NY-CLU received a similar inquiry from the Public Bridge Authority.

More than attracting the attention of the government, Beyer hopes that the festival gets the public's attention. He wants Americans to focus on ending the war, and Canadians to support American war resisters, and fight for their right to stay there. Currently there are nearly two dozen war resisters publicly living in Canada. If they are sent back to the US, they face jail sentences and harsh fines. "It just blows my mind that we're going through this all again," Beyer says, referring to the war resisters. "When is this going to stop? When there are 2,500 kids killed and who knows how many thousands of Iraqis? Americans go around with their American flags, and it doesn't seem to touch anybody's life."

At Peace Has No Borders, though, the speakers will reach deep into their own experiences to try and touch the lives of everyone who attends.

### Featured Speakers

**Stephen T. Banko III**—Beside being New York State's most decorated Vietnam vet (awarded two Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, the Air Medal and four Purple Hearts), Banko is the director of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) local field office. He frequently writes about his experiences in Vietnam.

**David Cline**—Buffalo native and national president of Veterans for Peace, Kline fought with the Army in Vietnam. He considers this his first true homecoming since Vietnam.

**Michael McPhearson**—The national director of Veterans for Peace, McPhearson fought with the Army in the first Gulf War. Along with directing VFP, he is a member of Military Families Speak Out and serves on the committees of the Bring Them Home Now campaign and United for Peace and Justice.

**Geoffrey Millard**—An Army National Guard veteran from Lockport who served 13 months in Iraq, Millard is now a vocal member of Iraq Veterans Against the War.

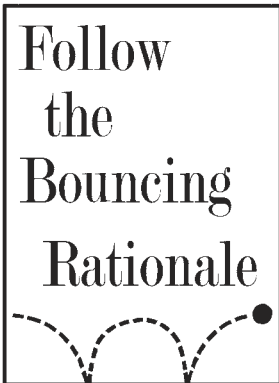
**Dede Miller, Bill Mitchell and Cindy Sheehan**—Three of the nine founding members of Gold Star Families for Peace. Mitchell lost his 25-year-old son, Michael, in a battle in Sadr City in 2004. Sheehan lost her 25-year-old son, Casey, in the same incident. Miller is Casey's aunt. Sheehan brought the organization international fame last summer when she spent five weeks camped out in front of President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas, demanding an audience with him. Though he never granted her an audience, Sheehan's vigil was so widely covered that it gave a huge boost to the national anti-war campaign.

**Army Colonel Mary Ann Wright**—Mary A. Wright resigned her post on March 19, 2003, just two days after the invasion of Iraq. After 29 years of service to America, she decided she disagreed with the administration's policies too much to serve. The reasons she listed for resigning were: the administration's preemptive invasion of Iraq, the administration's indifference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the administration's lack of a policy on North Korea and the administration's well-documented attacks on civil rights at home.

—peter koch

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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