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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.

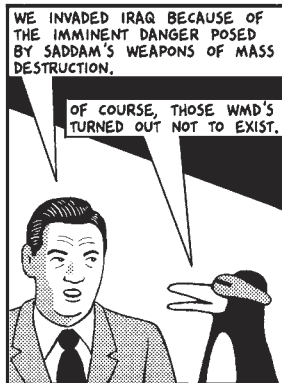
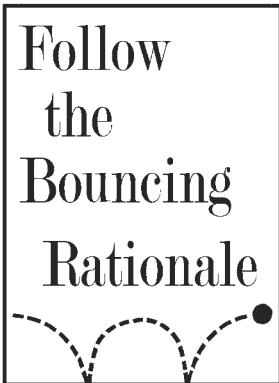
Dede Miller, Bill Mitchell and Cindy Sheehan—Three of the nine founding members of Gold Star Families for Peace. Mitchell lost his 25-year-old son, Michael, in a battle in Sadr City in 2004. Sheehan lost her 25-year-old son, Casey, in the same incident. Miller is Casey's aunt. Sheehan brought the organization 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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■ THE SILENCE OF THE POLITICIANS

The Seneca Gaming Corporation and the H-O Asbestos

According to documents obtained by casino opponents last week, Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown's office has for some time possessed Seneca Gaming Corporation studies indicating that the silos comprising the H-O Oats grain elevator were coated with a 54,000-square-foot skin that was between eight and 14 percent asbestos. Brown's office did not include the studies in its response to a FOIA request. They came to light only because of repeated requests by plaintiff's lawyers in one of the anti-casino court actions.

Starting on the Memorial Day weekend, the SGC set about tearing down the silos using a process that could not help but release huge quantities of asbestos-laden dust into the air. The dust drifted all over the neighborhood, primarily to the east—to the offices and homes in the Elk Lofts and the hundreds of apartments in the Perry Street projects. Sometimes, when the wind shifted, the dust drifted toward Dunn Tire Park, where thousands of people watched evening baseball games and came out to find their cars coated with the stuff.

The only mitigation used by the SGC's wrecking crew was a water spray that didn't come within 30 feet of the tops of the silos, and some of the time it wasn't even pointing at the same side of the wall being wrecked, so whenever the wrecking device smashed into the wall, you'd see some dust and wreckage fall down, and other dust drift up and away.

If you stood in the driveway of the Elk lofts across Perry Street from the site, you could sometimes feel a fine, moist spray on your skin. When the water dried the dust would be left on your skin or clothes or on the ground or on buildings where the water had fallen, ready to join the other dust blowing eastward, toward the Perry Street projects.

According to SGC spokesman Philip Pantano, there was nothing to worry about because the asbestos covering the silos wasn't dangerous asbestos. His theory seemed to be that all 54,000 square feet of asbestos covering the silos fell to the ground where it was wetted down and carted away. (Pantano seems to have replaced SGC President Barry Snyder as the gambling organization's public face, perhaps because Snyder almost always said something so arrogant or contemptuous that his statements wound up angering more people than they assuaged.)

It is difficult to believe that only concrete but none of the asbestos skin was pulverized when the 1,500-pound wrecking device hit, or that none of that pulverized asbestos was in the dust drifting across and down Perry Street. Dust like that settles on things; people breathe it; it gets into the water supply.



Jeff Bechtel is the EPA's Emergency Response On-scene Coordinator. The EPA is currently testing the air for asbestos at the HO Oats demolition site. PHOTOS BY ROSE MATTREY

Pantano's theory is so unlikely you would have thought that at least one of the neighborhood's elected representatives would have demanded some guarantee of public safety beyond the SGC's assertion that they'd do nothing harmful to anyone. You would have thought they would have done their own independent evaluation of the likely effects of pulverizing that asbestos covering the concrete. And after the wrecking started and it became clear that the demolition company was doing nothing beyond the single water spray, you'd have thought they'd have demanded an independent analysis of what was being dumped in the street and the air.

Only Erie County Executive Joel Giambra bothered to have such an independent analysis done. The sample, which County Attorney Lawrence Rubin picked up in the street off the site, contained eight percent asbestos, whereupon Giambra asked the EPA to intervene.

Not a word or a question from Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown, who had the SGC's own reports documenting the 54,000 square feet of asbestos covering.

Not a word from Common Council President David Franczyk, in whose district all this has been going on. Not a word from State Senator William Stachowski or State Assemblyman Mark Schroeder.

The SGC says it's not subject to New York environmental law, so perhaps those elected representatives kept quiet because they thought they were impotent. More likely, they had other reasons.

Any one of them could have asked for federal intervention, as Giambra did. Not one of them did it.

And neither did the district's and area's three federal representatives. Not a word from Congressman Brian Higgins. Not a word from Senators Charles Schumer and Hilary Clinton. (The senators may be silent because they don't want to annoy

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PHOTO BY ROSE MATTREY



asbestos-laden dust. There's a huge amount of money and political pressure encouraging politicians to emulate the three monkeys who see, hear and speak no evil. Why else would Buffalo's city hall have maintained this exquisite silence?

Will the EPA shut it down? Will the EPA force a major clean-up? Will the EPA seal the site? There is great pressure on all federal agencies these days to let casino things slide. Indian casino money is fattening many Congressional PACs (notably that of Tom Reynolds, who regularly receives big checks from several Western gambling tribes). But the EPA was embarrassed when word got out that it had given in to White House pressure and softpedaled environmental dangers in New York City after the September 11 disaster. It may want to use the Buffalo case to show that it really does take its job of protecting the public seriously, however much money is being thrown around and however

the Sullivan County business interests who are trying to get an Indian casino in the racetrack there. Who knows why people don't do things they should?)

Not a word from the *Buffalo News*, at least not until the EPA came to town on Sunday, after which, in Monday's paper, Michael Beebe detailed the whole sorry affair.

It's now all up in the air, along with the

much political pressure is being applied. Stay tuned.

—bruce jackson

Bruce Jackson is SUNY Distinguished Professor and Samuel P. Capen Professor of American Culture at UB. For a slideshow of his photographs of the demolition of the H-O Oats elevator, visit <http://buffaloreport.com/ho/ho.html>.

av

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REPUBLICANS PROPOSE BILL TO OUTLAW GAY ILLEGAL-IMMIGRANT MEXICAN MUSLIMS

by WARD "SAME OL STORY" SUTTON

SENATOR SHITHEAD, REPUBLICAN, IS WORRIED ABOUT HIS RE-ELECTION.

I'M UP TO MY FLAG LAPEL PIN IN BRIBERY ALLEGATIONS, ABRAMOFF SCANDAL LINKS AND EMBARRASSING TIES TO HOOKERGATE!

BY GOLLY, IT'S TIME I STRAIGHTEN OUT AND GET BACK TO DOING WHAT THE PEOPLE ELECTED ME TO DO IN THE FIRST PLACE.

STATESMAN THAT HE IS, HE TAKES TO THE SENATE FLOOR.

MY FELLOW AMERICANS, THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY CALLS FOR UNITY, NOT DIVISIVE POLITICS.

HOWEVER ...

UNLESS YOU WANT ALL YOUR VIRGIN-ASSED SONS PERVERTED AND CONVERTED INTO MARRYING SOME GREASY, BROWN-SKINNED JOB-STEALING HOMBRE NAMED CHICO AND FLYING A PLANE INTO A SKYSCRAPER ...

THEN WE MUST OUTLAW GAY ILLEGAL-IMMIGRANT MEXICAN MUSLIMS -- BEFORE NOVEMBER!

SENATOR WIFFLEBRAIN, DEMOCRAT, SQUIRMS OVER HOW TO RESPOND.

SHITHEAD'S PROPOSAL IS LUDICROUS. IT'S UGLY, OFFENSIVE AND AGAINST EVERYTHING I BELIEVE AMERICA STANDS FOR.

AND SO ... WE DEMOCRATS CONSIDER KEEPING OUR NATION SAFE FROM THE THREAT OF GAY ILLEGAL-IMMIGRANT MEXICAN MUSLIMS OUR TOP PRIORITY. HOWEVER ...

WE BELIEVE THAT TECHNICALLY THIS BILL IS UNNECESSARY AND THEREFORE STAND AGAINST LETTING IT GO TO THE FLOOR FOR A VOTE.

LATER, POST-ELECTION ...

STILL GOTTS NO HEALTH 'SURANCE, STILL GOTTS TO DRIVE TO CANADA T'GET AFFORDABLE MEDICINE FER MA, STILL DON'T KNOW WHEN MY BOY'S COMIN' HOME FROM IRAQ ...

BUT THANK GOD WE KEPT THEM SOFT-ON-GAY-ILLEGAL-IMMIGRANT-MEXICAN-MUSLIMS DEMOCRATS OUT OF OFFICE!!

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