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Fallen Heroes Project artist captures soldiers' legacy

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son that Herzberg felt touched the heart and soul of who his son was.

"What Michael does is bring a level of realism to the portrait that is amazing," said Herzberg. He doesn't just draw a portrait but captures the essence of the soldier – a look, a dimple, a mischievous twinkle in the eye. "There is a message with each portrait that says: 'I'm all right. I didn't suffer. I like where I am. Don't worry about me.' There is a message of calm and healing that comes with each portrait," said Herzberg.

Reagan, a Vietnam veteran, is internationally known for his portraits of professional athletes, movie stars and world leaders. One day he got an e-mail request from a woman to do a commission portrait of her husband who died in Iraq and was struggling with her loss and "forever remembering him." Reagan decided he couldn't charge her – this was something he must do, at no charge.

"What else could I do, from one combat veteran for another," said Reagan in his online biography, www.michaelreaganartist.com. He told his wife that not only was he going to draw her husband, but he was going to "illustrate them all" – all the men and women who died in Iraq. To date, he has drawn 1,800 portraits, at

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ERIC HERZBERG
Fallen Heroes Project spokesman

the request of the families.

Thirteen months ago, Herzberg met Reagan and discovered the artist trying to run the business by himself, drawing two portraits each day, seven days a week. So he offered to take over as much of the business aspects as he could. "I convinced him to reach the families directly and figured out how to get the message out. God opened doors in amazing ways," said Herzberg. Reagan gets 25-30 requests per week – a doable number for the artist.

What's compelling about Reagan is that he not only draws portraits of the soldier but, in special situations, also of family members and pets with him or her. Some of the most touching portraits are those drawn of the soldier holding a baby who never had a chance to meet his



COURTESY PHOTO

Michael Reagan has completed 1,800 portraits of fallen heroes so far.

or her dad. "Can you imagine what that will mean to that child someday?" asks Herzberg.

"I'm often asked 'How did you know,'" Reagan said in his biography, about certain individual characteristics that come alive in the portraits. He says that sometimes things show up that weren't in the original photo and he can't explain why, but the drawings are always right. He describes the Fallen Heroes Project as "something I've been preparing my whole life to do." As a soldier in Vietnam, he used to draw portraits of

his fellow soldiers in long lulls between battles.

He does all the "Fallen Hero" drawings uninterrupted at his home studio. "Some take three hours, and some take 10," explained Reagan on his Web site. "I honestly believe that the spirit of the soldier is with me when I'm working."

And that's what keeps Herzberg going each day as he connects with family members who have lost a loved one. He hears story after story of how the portraits comforted them in some way, such as how a grieving

mother finally had her first peaceful night's sleep in over a year after she received the portrait. And, for Herzberg, it keeps the memory of his son alive.

"He was so fearless. I have an amazing admiration for him," said Herzberg as he reflected on Eric's personality. "He deepened his faith when he was in the Marine Corps. He had a quality and decency about him."

Herzberg continues that legacy by now reaching out to fallen heroes' families beyond our borders – in Canada, Australia and England.

"In working with Michael, I have to remember it's not all about me," said Herzberg. "We remember that there are 5,000 other families out there with equally compelling stories to tell about their sons and daughters."

Herzberg draws his strength and new-found purpose from his son, who lived a life full of purpose and meaning. "At the end of your life, no matter how long or short, one of the highest callings is to know you made a difference. This was a wake-up call for me. When I said good-bye, I said I would finish the legacy he started – living a life of service in God's will, and living a life with purpose," said Herzberg.

For information on the Fallen Heroes Project, visit www.fallen-heroesproject.org.

School district holding events to help find people employment

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lion in federal stimulus funding earmarked for Title I and special education for fiscal years 2010 and 2011. It helped save 300 jobs by restoring them. This includes 106 teaching positions, she said.

Some of the positions that were cut included achievement coaches, who are master teachers in an educational area and have a known history of working to attain student achievement, Knighton said.

Other positions that were cut include parent liaisons who work with both parents and guardians and staff at the schools.

Knighton said the district will continue to employ 87 parent liaisons and they will be going to more than one school to work. More than 50 percent of them are bilingual.

"It's a matter of how we distribute them," she said.

During a recent school board meeting, several members of the Spanish-speaking community expressed concern the parent liaison position would be eliminated.

Thirty-three jobs were lost that were earmarked for assistant princi-

pals, Knighton said.

Many of them will continue to teach in the schools and one person declined to continue to keep their certification current.

Some of the positions that were lost are for pupil personnel workers, who perform duties similar to ones social worker do.

Knighton said no counselors lost their jobs and some of the pupil personnel workers met the criteria to become guidance counselors.

To assist those who have lost jobs, the district held events to help them find new employment.

"We did a transition center for those who are leaving the school system. We reached out to them," she said.

Knighton said there were 42 resignations by July 15 and last year at the same time, there had been 78 of them.

She said the district is having a hard time finding people who are qualified to teach family consumer science.

Despite the loss of the positions within the PGCS, Knighton said the district is hiring people to become substitute teachers, lunch monitors, bus drivers and classroom teachers.

'Public safety and public education, there is nothing more important than that'

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Sponsored by 21st District representative Maryland Sen. Jim Rosapepe and delegates Barbara Frush, Ben Barnes and Joseline Peña-Melnyk, the forum also included Gov. Martin O'Malley.

"This is held to give you an opportunity to talk with the governor," Rosapepe said.

O'Malley said, "These are tough times. I don't know what the next chapters in the story we share are."

James "Jim" Baer, an information technology specialist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, was one of the first citizen speakers.

He told the audience and politicians to support the center in any way they can.

He held aloft a copy of the public program and told people the center is worthy of support. The program was given to an O'Malley staffer to read.

One of the men in the audience said he has concerns about gang activity in general and in Anne Arundel County.

O'Malley said Operation Safe Kids provides good resources to combat youth violence. This organization operates in Baltimore.

"Public safety and public education, there is nothing more important than that," the governor said.

O'Malley encouraged the man to keep pushing public officials in Anne Arundel County to maintain a high level of public safety.

An X-ray technician asked O'Malley if he has seen the appearance of trees in Western Maryland, referring to aerial spraying to kill gypsy moths.

She and others told the governor about the seriousness of their chemical sensitivities. O'Malley said he had seen the trees and would meet with the people who expressed their concern about chemical sensitivities.

A woman from Adelphi said foreclosed houses plague the small city and asked how a foreclosure prevention workshop held earlier the same day in Hyattsville fared.

O'Malley told her much information was shared with people during the event and Maryland is doing

much more than other states to help people with foreclosure prevention and problems.

There are many attorneys who are doing work at no charge to help people with financial housing issues.

Problems arise for people when a loan modification they seek winds up being as high, or even higher, as the original loan.

Adrian Rousseau of the Laurel Boy and Girls Club told the audience the facility is truly needed in the community, but needs funding to continue to serve the children.

"Without these kids, we have no hope for a future," he said about the positive impact the club can impart.

O'Malley told Rousseau that the challenge for his group and others is garnering operating funds.

Likewise, a Laurel woman said she seeks help for programs involving her daughter with cerebral palsy and other children with special needs.

Rosapepe said O'Malley is working his best to keep the state and its citizens remain prosperous.

"He's very knowledgeable. He's very caring and he's working for all of us," he said.