

## A Hero's Welcome and Another Send Off

(Crystal A. Proxmire, The Ferndale 115 News, March 1, 2012 ed.)

When Air Force Sargent Mark Sibula was on a secluded air base near Kandahar, Afghanistan, he did a lot of praying. "It is very scary when you're in a war zone. You gotta be cognizant of your environment."

The 50-year-old Ferndale-raised aircraft mechanic recently returned from a three and a half month tour in a NATO camp, which he said was essentially "in the middle of nowhere."

"The base was in the desert, surrounded by mountains. There were rocket attacks, almost on a daily basis. There were just random shots. Most of the rockets landed out in the desert. They come from way off in the mountains so they're not very accurate. Plus we had an early warning system, and that worked pretty well to keep us safe."

One of the most exciting experiences Sibula had was in Kirkuk, Iraq on June 2, 2004 when a rocket landed in a dry field of grass, and the fire spread to an ammo dump area. "There were five hours of explosions and there was nothing we could do but sit back and watch it," he said. The video below was taken by others on the scene that day:

"It wasn't scary because we were far enough away from it. But there was a scary thing at the end of October. One rocket hit 150 feet from where me and a buddy were out driving in a jeep. That was pretty scary." 

Sibula shared his war stories at the Hangin' with the Heroes event on Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012. Hangin' with the Heroes is Ferndale's way of celebrating the sacrifices made by the men and women of the armed forces. A party is held to recognize send offs and homecomings, complete with honors and

recognition, plus a delicious spread of food shared with community members. City Councilpersons Mike Lennon and Dan Martin were among the dignitaries, as was Frank Flores of the American Legion, Hangin' with the Heroes Founder Ron Gilmour, and the group's President.

Now that Sibula is back in Michigan working with the 127<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing of the Air Force in Selfridge as his civilian job. Sibula graduated from Ferndale High in 1980 and has been in the Air Force Reserves ever since. "At the time the job market is like it is today, and I needed to find work. That  seemed like a secure job."

As Ferndale welcomed Sibula's return, they also said "see you later" to a talented young 2010 Ferndale High School graduate as she prepared to leave for San Antonio, Texas.

Ashley Vozel, who turned 20 on Feb. 19, 2012, has departed Ferndale to live her dreams of joining the Air Force Military Police. Vozel went to Ferndale Schools from kindergarten to graduation and was active in cheerleading, volleyball, tennis, football and softball. She also worked for the Department of Public Works.

When asked what made her want to sign up for that service, she confidently responded "Honestly it's a lot of power. And I will be qualified to come back and get a job in the police department."

Gilmour recognized Vozel and teased her a bit in his presentation, saying that she used to be a Scout that loved to camp. "She's hoping basic training will be as fun as Girl Scout Camp," he said. "Good luck with that."

Vozel will go through basic training and is expected to remain in the Air Force for six years. 

To find out more about Hangin' with the Heroes, follow them on

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