

MARINES

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"I was really upset after 9-11," said Weber, who was recently promoted to the rank of corporal. "I wanted to do something to make a difference. I didn't want to sit around and do nothing. I always thought the Marine Corps was the toughest (branch of service) and I felt that if I was going to join the military, I wanted to do it right."

And he wanted one of his friends beside him.

Weber had spoken to former Dallas High School wrestling standout Perry Coolbaugh about joining the Marines with him on the buddy plan. But when Coolbaugh joined the Corps in December 2003, he filled the final spot available for the FAST company.

"We saw each other a little during boot camp, but we didn't have much time to talk," said Weber, who was a teammate of Coolbaugh's on the Noxen Strikers elementary wrestling team. "But when we went to Basic Security Guard School, we saw each other a lot."

That was just the beginning.

When a spot became available for the FAST program, Weber took advantage of it. And a few weeks later, two of the best wrestlers in the Wyoming Valley Conference - who attended rival high schools only a few miles apart - were roommates.

"We became really good friends," said Weber, a former District 2 champion wrestler and two-time state qualifier. Coolbaugh, who graduated from Dallas in 2003, was a two-time district champion who recorded more than 100 career wins for the

Mountaineers. "We went to New Hampshire together for the refueling of a nuclear submarine and we (provided border security) in Cuba together. We've had some good times."

Established in 1987, FAST companies are equipped to perform security missions as directed by the Naval Chief of Operations. While they don't spend their time hunting down terrorists, members of the team defend Marine Corps and U.S. Navy assets from terrorists attacks.

"We're the Marine Corps SWAT team," said Weber, referring to civilian Special Weapons and Tactic squads.

"We try to get the terrorists before they act. Our job is to deter, detect and defend. We want to provide a physical presence so the terrorists won't even try to attack us."

A knee injury to Weber forced the two Back Mountain Marines to go their separate ways - at least for now. Although he's back to active duty, Weber's injury - he has no cartilage in his left knee - has forced him to serve as a combat marksman instructor for young Marines in Norfolk - where he expects to serve until his discharge in February 2008.

Meanwhile, Lance Corporal Coolbaugh has been stationed in Japan for the past six months, one of approximately 15 countries to which he has been sent. He's expected to return to Norfolk on July 19.

"I'm sure I could get a medical discharge if I want, but I want an honorable discharge," said Weber. "You feel proud when you wear the uniform. A lot of people go though life feeling as though they didn't accomplish anything, while other people feel like they've made a difference. That's the way I feel, like I'm making a difference."



FOR THE POST/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Joanne Prohaskas holds a poster of Humphrey Bogart during the auction.

AUCTION

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Another popular item on the auction block was a painting done by Dallas artist Sue Hand. Each year, the owner of Sue Hand's Imagery on Main Street paints a picture during the auction and the painting is put up for bid. This year's painting was sold to Dennis and Peggy Brislin for \$3,100.

Sweeney stepped up as chairperson of the auction this year after Paul Nicholson was unable to fulfill his duties because of an unfortunate car accident in May.

"Paul is on the mend," said Sweeney a Kingston Township resident. "I went to visit him in the hospital and he gave me the thumbs up because he can't talk. We are hoping he is on the mend for next year's event."

Sweeney said the event couldn't have been so successful without the help of the entire Back Mountain and other communities.

"Events like this keep the town together and it's nice to be a part of it," she said. "It gives you a truly special feeling."



Auctioneer Steve Traver holds everyone's attention on the auction block.

BACK MOUNTAIN Dining Guide

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