

The DALLAS POST

50¢

Serving the communities of the Dallas and Lake-Lehman School Districts | www.mydallaspost.com

CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST
Jackson Township Police Officer Ken Kugler has just recently returned from a nine-month tour of duty in Afghanistan with a reserve unit.

Kugler is back from war zone

By EILEEN GODIN
Dallas Post Correspondent

If eyes could talk, Ken Kugler's green eyes would speak volumes about his experience of serving nine months with the Pennsylvania National Guard 109th Field Artillery Unit in Mehtar Lam, Afghanistan.

A full-time police officer with Jackson Township, Kugler was activated in March 2008 and teamed up with the 3rd 103 Armory to support the Afghanistan army and police while interacting with the local community.

Sitting back in a chair in the Jackson Township Police Station with a cup of coffee, Kugler came off his first police patrol shift since his return in November feeling a little tired but very willing to share stories of his experience overseas.

While waiting to get off the plane at the Avoca International Airport, he was the first one in the airplane's doorway. His sister, Jackie Imler, of Lehman, and his fiancée, Jesse Gibben, of Shavertown, did not recognize him.

Gibben was so overcome with emotions and thrilled to see her fiancée that she did not take notice of his weight loss. Kugler couldn't wait to sink his teeth into a Whopper and mom's lasagna.

While Kugler was overseas, Gibben e-mailed him daily. Kugler would normally e-mail her two to three times a week, however, hair-raising moments did occur when she didn't hear from him for a week or two.

"You would hear about these horrible situations on the news and think, 'Oh, I hope he wasn't involved in that,'" said Gibben, who found emotional support from co-workers at Luzerne County's 911 dispatch office.

While Kugler was in Afghanistan, he and Gibben discussed wedding plans and dates. Although the couple knew marriage was in their future, concrete wedding plans were made while Kugler was stationed overseas.

Kugler painted a picture of his overseas home as a dusty, rocky mountain overlooking a valley with fluctuating temperatures.

"One day it was 149 degrees," he said, "and when we left, it was snowing."

Kugler and his fellow soldiers slept in tents, ate in a brick mess hall and rotated spending time in an outpost called the "Bee Hut," a 12 X 24 foot wooden box where 8 to 10 people lived for a week at a time. Soldiers staying at the outpost monitored a "Y" intersection of dirt roads.

"It was like living with 10 brothers," he said.

The men found touches of home in the conditions as wild dogs hung around the outpost and main camp. Although some were mean, others were hungry and looking for food scraps.

"There were three dogs that stayed around the Bee Hut," Kugler said. "They were friendly and liked to play with us. We tried

See KUGLER, Page 11



6 098151 20079 19

Medical care on skis

By REBECCA BRIA
rbria@timesleader.com

He was a morning newspaper carrier in Shavertown for the Wilkes-Barre Record in the late 1950s and president of the 1960 graduating class of the former Westmoreland High School in Kingston Township.

Although Dr. Jack Eck was raised as a small-town boy, he grew up to be one of the leading physicians in Colorado.

Eck, 66, formerly of Shavertown, is now retired from medicine, but works full-time doing strategic planning for Vail Valley Medical Center in Vail, Colo. He is helping to plan and secure funds to build a new hospital and several clinics.

After Eck completed medical school at Temple University in 1968, he and several of his medical school buddies headed to Colorado.

"Those were the days we were all drafted to Vietnam," Eck said. "Since we all knew we were going there, we figured, 'Let's just go out some place and learn how to ski, hike and get our internship done before we have to go in.' They would not take us in the military until we at least had one year of our internship in."

Eck was, indeed, drafted to Vietnam where he served as a flight surgeon. When he returned, he wanted to complete an orthopedic residency at Temple University. The race riots in Philadelphia, however, reminded him too much of the intense combat he had witnessed in Vietnam so he escaped to the calm mountains in Vail once again.

"I probably would have been an orthopedist and come back to the area but, after Vietnam, things were really in turmoil in the world," Eck said. "I just wanted to get away for a while."

At that time, Vail was beginning to grow and only a small medical clinic existed. Since then, the area has exploded into a huge resort area where an average of 18,000 to 20,000 people now ski Vail Mountain every day during the winter months.

Eck made sure Vail's medical care expanded, too. He is responsible for helping to establish a

hospital and develop the Shaw Regional Cancer Care Center, a program of Vail Valley Medical Center. Jack's Place, which provides accommodations for patients of the cancer center and their loved ones, was named for Eck.

"Since I was the third doctor that came and stayed, if we needed something we just did it and took it on," Eck said. "Over the last 38 years I've been here, we didn't have all the super regulations that are here today."

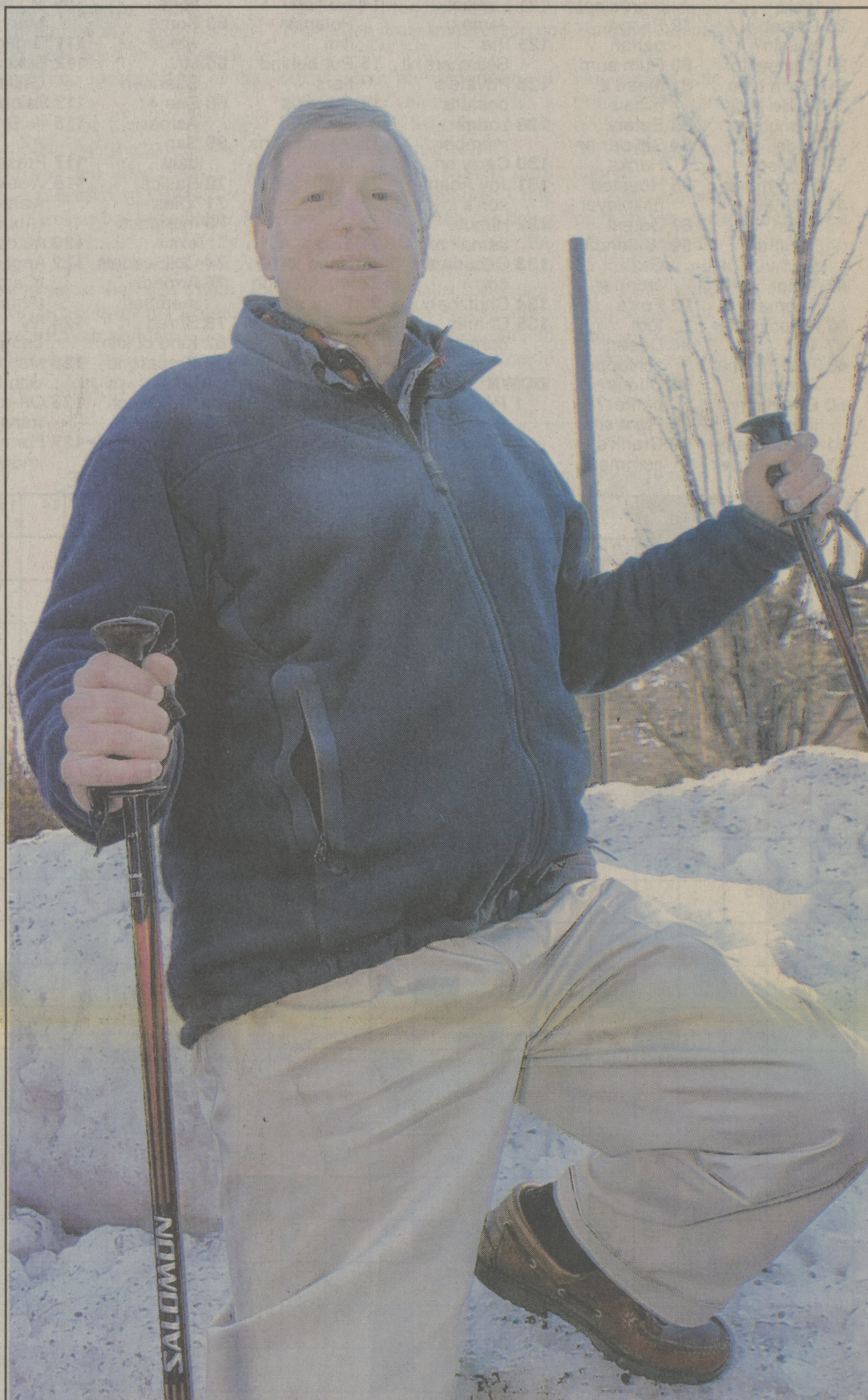
Eck has treated many prominent people over the years and, although privacy laws prohibit him from naming them, some of his patients include presidents and vice-presidents, astronauts and members of European royalty families. He's also cared for local miners and ranchers, members of the ski patrol, ski instructors, lift operators and, of course, skiers.

Member of the ski patrol wanted Eck to teach them trauma and medivac skills he learned in the military. He served as a member of the ski patrol from 1970 through 1980, treating skiers for everything from breaks and sprains to heart attacks, and has been the patrol's medical director since. Eck is also part of an avalanche control team that throws explosive hand charges into the snow to cause a controlled avalanche and stabilize the snow pack.

"The fun part of the ski patrol is it's more than skiing," Eck said. "It's helping give back."

Eck is the son of the late Frederick and Evelyn Eck, of Shavertown. His three sisters - Marilyn, Dorothy and Beverly - no longer live in the Back Mountain

See SKIS, Page 11



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Dr. Jack Eck, 66, of Vail, Colo., is a former resident of Shavertown. Eck is responsible for helping to establish a hospital and develop the Shaw Regional Cancer Care Center in Vail, which is a program of Vail Valley Medical Center. Jack's Place, which provides accommodations for patients of the cancer center and their loved ones, was named for Eck.

This guy is obsessed with home video games

By CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK
Dallas Post correspondent

Joe Stachnik can't stay away from home video games.

The Dallas resident, however, is not alone as the Entertainment Software Association reports that millions of children, teens and now 19 percent of adults over the age of 50 have the same addiction.

Stachnik's top four favorite games are "Final Fantasy," "Metroid Prime," "Pokemon" and "Super Smash Brothers," all of which he says are well-designed video games that play well, especially on big screen TVs.

Home video games is a topic Stachnik should know about as he is a student of game art and design at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Fla., a school started by John and Mabel Ringling, members of the famous circus family.

Stachnik's first semester is packed with core courses like figure drawing, 3-D design, art history and a writing studio, but next semester he'll study the history of games and an animation class.

"I wake up and feel like I'm on vacation or that I'm living a dream," the 2007 Dallas High School graduate says of his career and college choice.

A son of Jeff and Bonnie Stachnik, Stachnik thinks the art, design and drawing skills of students at the college is why officials of large video-game studios like Sony Computer, Activision, Lukas Arts



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Joe Stachnik, a freshman at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Fla., holds up an art piece he has created. The art work can be used for computer games.

and Blizzard Entertainment frequent the campus. They offer paid internships, including housing and living stipends in major metropolitan areas, to juniors and seniors. There are career opportunities in movie animation to consider, also.

"Every kid down there wants to work for Pixar (Disney) as an animator; but there are other companies like Dream Works and Blue Sky who make animated movies, too," said Stachnik, who will finish with a four-year degree in fine arts, majoring in game art and design.

The college was recommended to him by Claire Morris, his art teacher at Dallas High School. Stachnik attended a pre-college four-week summer program in Florida during his senior year in high school, falling in love with the area and the school.

"I loved it," he said wistfully of that first visit. "I didn't want to come back. I wanted to stay on campus forever."

After undergoing a rigorous admission process that included preparing a portfolio, Stachnik considered himself lucky to

have been accepted at the school, whose enrollment is about 1200.

"I was shocked," he said.

Watching an animated movie is hard for him, he says, because he gets involved in looking at all the technical and production aspects of the work or analyzing how it was made.

"Sometimes I just like to watch the movies," he added, admitting that he often gravitates to video games. "I just can't keep away from them."

During the Christmas break, Stachnik visited the Dallas art studio of Sue Hand, who has been both a teacher and inspiration for him since he was in kindergarten.

He showed a class of ogling youngsters a 1 1/2 foot high character sculpture he created from self-hardening clay that he hopes to one day incorporate into a game.

Stachnik draws personal and artistic inspiration from his family and says, "everyone in my family has talent."

His youngest brother, John, draws pictures for him and he has always admired a picture of a mouse and grass that his father drew years ago.

It's also a plus that his grandfather, Mike Kester, lives in Florida part-time and takes him out on excursions while he's at school.

"I don't get much free time at school but I love going out with him when I do," Stachnik said of his grandfather.

Delightedly, Stachnik says the artistic atmosphere he has landed in is amazing. "I am living a dream," he repeated.