

BEYOND PTSD



Iraq War veteran Lee Wagner describes moral injury, which happens when people feel they become responsible for actions that violate their moral compass, at Passavant Retirement Community Wednesday morning. CHRIS KOPACZ/BUTLER EAGLE

Iraq veteran confronts the spiritual toll of war

By Chris Kopacz
Eagle Staff Writer

ZELIENOPLE — Many people who serve in the U.S. Armed Forces find themselves charged with commands that challenge their beliefs.

In the case of Lee Wagner, who deployed to Iraq as a Marine Corps sergeant in 2003, his very arrival led to an unforeseen dread.

“When we were entering into Iraq, the first few hours, few days of entering into Iraq, there was a lot of children along the side of the road,” he said.

“We were kind of driving through there, and one particular young Iraqi girl was standing on the side of the road, very much crying,” he said. “And I don’t know why she was crying. I don’t know if something really bad just happened in her life, or if she just stubbed her toe. I don’t know.”

“But just the wherewithal of the situation hit me there,” he said.

“I was like, ‘I’m here to do a good thing. I want to do good things, but I’m now witnessing firsthand the possible negative impact of what we’re doing,’” he said.

For many service members, moral injury could result from acting on orders from military commanders and political leaders whose ethics don’t align with theirs, who might compel them to make choices that cross a moral line for them, Wagner said.

“The military is a violent industry,” he said. “The Department of Defense has a mission. Fight battles. Win wars.”

“Whatever gets broken, somebody else will fix,” he said.

That mission differs from the same one the Veteran Affairs Department, chaplains and other civic leaders have, he said.

The problem of moral



injury often contributes heavily to the problem of suicide. Wagner, who works for the Northwestern Pennsylvania Veterans Suicide Prevention Program, said people die by suicide mainly because they believe suicide is the only solution to their problem.

Their problem, he said, often involves a long story, and while moral injury does play a role in that, so do a range of other factors, including mental health conditions like depression.

Wagner also said military sexual assault trauma often causes a kind of moral injury, too.

“Having a leadership that doesn’t stand up for you, or leadership that creates an environment where sexual harassment is allowed to take place — that is very much a moral injury that we can see within the military community.”

But veterans and fami-

MORAL INJURY:

The damage done to one’s conscious or moral compass when that person perpetuates, witnesses or fails to prevent acts that transgress one’s own moral beliefs, values or ethical codes of conduct.

— Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

lies can find help for moral injury in a variety of forms, he said. They can seek clinical treatments at VA clinics and other forms of therapy, spiritual treatments (which can involve religion but also do not need to) and community-based treatments, he said.

Several community-based services for veterans enrich Butler County. This includes the VA Butler Health Care system based on New Castle Road in Butler Township.

“What the VA does offer is a variety of physical and mental health, as well access to chaplaincy, and psychology and therapy that can work with this,” he said.

“Within community you have camaraderie, men and women who have served,” he said.

Throughout Butler County, he said, numerous Veteran of Foreign War outposts, American League offices and Marine Corps Leagues also enrich the region.

Some 10K mink loose, missing

By Associated Press

VAN WERT, Ohio — Vandals freed thousands of mink at a rural northwest Ohio farm, leaving an estimated 10,000 of the small carnivorous mammals unaccounted for Tuesday evening, the local sheriff said.

So many minks were killed crossing a nearby road that a plow was brought in to help clear the carcasses away, said Van Wert County Sheriff Thomas Riegenbach.

The property owner initially estimated 25,000 to

40,000 mink were released from their cages at Lion Farms, Riegenbach said. But he said employees at the farm were able to corral many of the ones that remained on the property, which is less than 15 miles from the Indiana state line.

He declined to discuss any potential motive for the overnight vandalism or say whether any suspect has been identified as his office investigates.

A farm manager told WANE-TV that someone left a spray-painted mes-

sage of the letters “ALF” and the phrase “we’ll be back.”

A group known as the Animal Liberation Front had previously claimed credit for releasing a much smaller number of mink at the farm in a previous incident years ago, the Times Bulletin in Van Wert reported.

Calls to a phone number listed for the farm were unanswered Tuesday, and it wasn’t accepting messages.

The sheriff’s office initially warned residents

in the area to be cautious with poultry flocks, small pets and koi ponds that the mink might attack, but it later said the freed mink are considered domesticated and likely lack the skills to survive in the wild.

The sheriff urged people who spot them not to approach them, and to contact the farm or trappers for recapturing. He said residents who want to hunt or trap mink must make sure they understand what related rules and exemptions apply in their area.

Middlesex Twp. hikes library contribution in proposed budget

By Logan Carney
Eagle Correspondent

MIDDLESEX TWP — Residents are now able to review the proposed 2023 budget, which includes a \$25,000 contribution to the Mars Area Public Library.

Supervisors on Wednesday approved advertising the \$3,476,098 spending plan, which is up from the 2022 budget of \$2,710,350.

Despite a proposed increase of more than \$765,000 from last year’s budget, the 2023 budget is less than the year-to-date actual expenditures for 2022, according to figures provided by the township. Through September 2022, the actual expenditures add up to \$3,622,189, a difference of almost \$150,000 compared to the 2023 budget.

Even though higher than the 2022 budget, the overall expenditures are still currently less than the 2022 total general fund revenue, which was projected to be \$3,891,947 and is at \$4,141,734 through September of 2022. The 2023 proposed budget is projecting a similar general fund revenue of \$3,830,673.

The council approved a significant increase to its contribution to the Mars library for 2023 with members noting a lot of township residents use the library. The previous contribution of \$5,000, which remained the same for years, was increased to \$25,000 in the proposed budget.

Despite the increase in library budget, the actual cultural/recreation budget decreased slightly from \$209,000 to \$181,500. This is mainly due to a decrease in projected costs for capital improvements from

\$200,000 estimated in the 2022 budget to \$100,000 in 2023.

Also seeing a decrease is the public works budget, which has gone down almost \$250,000 from \$996,014 to \$741,160. This is partially down because the 2022 budget included \$125,000 for snow removal supplies, whereas the 2023 budget allots \$50,000. Another \$300,000 was budgeted in 2022 for contracted services for a road program concerning highways. Only \$6,854 has been spent toward that this year, and no money is budgeted toward it in the proposal.

Multiple categories in the budget saw around \$40,000 increases, but the significant increase in the total budget from 2022-23 is primarily due to two factors.

First, \$500,000 is being budgeted to transfer to capital funds, whereas nothing was budgeted for that in 2022, although \$789,827 has been transferred to capital funds through September 2022.

The other factor is an increase from \$10,000 budgeted for contracted services in general government for 2022 to \$214,285 in 2023. That money is being used for PennDOT’s Balls Bend Realignment Project, which is making improvements to Route 228 to Route 8 through January 2025.

The public can view the proposed budget before it is voted on at next month’s regular meeting, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Dec. 21. The budget will be displayed at the municipality center. At the action meeting, residents are able to comment on the budget before the vote.

Kelly’s lymphedema bill passes House

Eagle Staff Report

The U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday passed the Lymphedema Treatment Act, H.R. 3630, which is co-led by U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly, R-16th. The bill will ensure Medicare Part B coverage of doctor-prescribed compression garments, the clinically recognized treatment for lymphedema.

The bill, which was reintroduced in May 2021, is led by Reps. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill, and Buddy Carter, R-Ga., and co-led by Reps. Kelly and Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore. The bill passed by a vote of 402-13.

“Today my bill, the

Lymphedema Treatment Act, passed the House with overwhelmingly bipartisan support,” Kelly said. “This bill will ensure lymphedema patients on Medicare get the treatment they deserve. Too often these patients cannot get their basic care covered by Medicare. Not anymore.”

The legislation will now move to the Senate.

Lymphedema can lead to infections, comorbidities and loss of function. Commercial insurance and state Medicaid programs cover compression therapy, but Medicare Part B does not cover most lymphedema treatments, Kelly said.

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