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A lifelong mission to help others » **Inside**



Joe Michaud-Scorza / jscorza@postbulletin.com

Sgt. First Class Doug Weigel, of Albert Lea, hugs his sons Darik and Darian after returning from his fourth tour of active duty, this time from Kuwait, Tuesday, at the Austin National Guard Community Center.

Moms, dads, heroes

Soldiers welcomed home after tours in Iraq, Kuwait

By Heather Rule
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Her hair done up in red, white and blue pigtails, 2-year-old Jaylynn Buchan waited for her mommy to return from deployment in the Middle East. When soldier Brianna Buchan, of Austin, got to the National Guard armory, she grabbed hold of Jaylynn with all her might.

Mother and daughter held each other tightly. Buchan bombarded that little face with kisses, as Jaylynn offered up smiles and giggles, her pigtails bobbing all around.

"It's amazing," Buchan said. "I couldn't wait to get off the bus. All I want to do is be with her."

Thirty-four soldiers returned to a welcome-home celebration about 2:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Austin National

Guard Community Center. The soldiers were part of the 1135th Combat Support Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment. They had been deployed in Iraq and Kuwait since August.

Buchan, who returned from her second deployment, had quite the welcoming crew of family and friends, including her mother, Darci Buchan, who had looked after Jaylynn while Brianna was deployed.

Darci Buchan said she was a little worried about how the little one would handle the reunion, since her mom had been away for so long. All appeared well.

"She hasn't let go yet," Darci Buchan said. "I don't think she'll let go for awhile."

The same could be said for others welcoming home their soldiers. Darian Weigel, 19, waited with his brothers and aunt Cassie Boettcher for his dad, Doug Weigel, of Albert Lea, to return home from his fourth deployment.

Since they're veterans of seeing their dad leave and come home from service, Darian Weigel said you get

used to it. He was simply looking forward to seeing his dad.

"It'll be nice to have him around," Darian Weigel said.

Plenty of community members also showed up to welcome the soldiers. Knowing that people are thinking about them means something, Brianna Buchan said.

"It helps us out a lot," Brianna Buchan said.

The soldiers were originally scheduled to make their entrance at 3:20 p.m., which was moved up to 1:10 p.m. earlier in the day.

Families milled around the community center as they got updates on where the bus was before it finally arrived at 2:30 p.m. They had already waited months.

"We can wait another hour," Boettcher said.

Page A6: Photo coverage of this event

 **AustinPB.com**
A slide show of this event

'I wish I would have known'

Sister of suicide victim speaks about bullying

By Heather Rule
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Brittany Ehmke spoke up for her sister, and spoke out against bullying.

The 22-year-old is the sister of Rachel Ehmke, 13, a Kasson-Mantorville seventh-grader who took her own life because of bullying, her family believes.



Brittany R. Ehmke told a group of more than 20 people Tuesday during a meeting of Community Against Bullying at Neveln Elementary School in Austin how her sister was bullied, and she recounted events that surrounded her sister's suicide.

"It hurts so bad because I wish I would have known what my little sister was going through," Brittany Ehmke said.

Tears flowed as she tried to begin speaking. As she talked about Rachel's death, many people began to shed tears. As she told her story, a hush fell over the room.

"This is the worst thing that you could ever go through," Brittany Ehmke said. "She felt like there was nothing else to do...."

"I just wish she would have known that this is not what had to happen."

The Ehmke family lost a sister and a daughter. "It's not fair at all," Brittany Ehmke said, listing the things her little sister will never get to experience: prom, having kids, getting married, driving.

Brittany Ehmke said she does not have sympathy for the girls who bullied Rachel; she has anger toward them. However, she also said she

Resources

Free, confidential help is available 24/7 at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Call 1-800-273-8255.

If you need help to deal with bullying, or want more information:

- An Olmsted Medical Center Foundation Founders Lecture focuses on "relational aggression" such as bullying. 5 p.m. May 9 at the Doubletree.
- stopbullying.gov.
- www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org.

does not want anything bad for them — and her sister wouldn't want that either.

"She would not want this to keep going," Brittany Ehmke said. "We just want anybody that is bullying just to stop."

"Rachel would want the girls that did this to be left alone."

Brittany Ehmke said she'll do anything to prevent other families from losing a daughter. She said she hopes it's an eye-opener, and if people view bullying as something normal, "it's not acceptable."

Community Against Bullying chairwoman Danielle Borgerson-Nesvold called Rachel's death "a horrible tragedy." This makes it clear that the group needs to push its efforts farther than just Austin, she said.

"There's such a huge need," Borgerson-Nesvold said. "It's life-saving. It's like life support."

Rachel's death wasn't like cancer or a car accident, Brittany Ehmke said. It could have been prevented. She told group members to talk to their kids about bullying.

"I want to do everything I can to share my story about Rachel," Brittany Ehmke said. "I will be fighting for my little sister."

Page A4: Walk for Rachel

Departure from Amish group gains woman freedom, nostalgia

By Kay Fate
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Saloma Furlong finally understands the world's fascination with the Amish.

"For a long time, no one could say anything good about the Amish, because I would set them straight immediately," she said. "Now, years later, I've started feeling nostalgic. I've started feeling the same kind of romanticism, in a way — and I had grown up in it and had decided to leave it."

She'll speak about her life Thursday at the Austin Public Library during a discussion

of her book, "Why I Left the Amish."

Furlong speaks openly of the reason she left: Her father's mental illness resulted in violence, and her mother "didn't protect us from the abuse." It was either leave or commit suicide, she said.

In the 30 years since she last lived as an Amish woman in Ohio, Furlong has had many adjustments to make, not the least of which was adapting to her freedom.

Though her father eventually received treatment for his illnesses, Furlong knew her decision to leave was the right one for her. All four of

her sisters also eventually left the Amish; her two brothers remain.

"It was an unbearable situation that we left," she said, "so there's some responsibility on (her parents') shoulders, but I always felt we all made that decision when we were adults."

Furlong first left her family when she was 20, though four months later, members of the community traveled to Vermont and took her back. She stayed for nearly three years, then left the community for good.

Furlong believes intrigue in the Amish lifestyle is an

all-time high, thanks in part to the flood of novels about the Amish — "but it's so inaccurate," she said.

"They're written by people who don't know the culture. There are certain nuances you'll never get unless you grew up Amish."

What she can't understand, though, is "why people want to put the Amish on a pedes-

tal or treat them like it's some kind of utopia," Furlong said. "There is not a utopia; it's a group of people who are living the life they believe is right for them, but there's a lot of problems that exist within the culture."

In addition to typical human problems, she cites the "tight gene pool that really promotes hereditary diseases among the Amish and a refusal to want to deal with it in any kind of educated sense. There's a belief that God will take care of it."

Furlong's own past included daring to challenge

the idea that the ministers and their messages could be wrong.

"It all has to do with personality," she said. "Most of the people I knew learned early on that the culture is not about saying no, it's about going along. I always wanted to learn that, but the questions just kept boiling up from within. You're not supposed to reflect on your life or question why things are so."

Continued on page A4: Information is power

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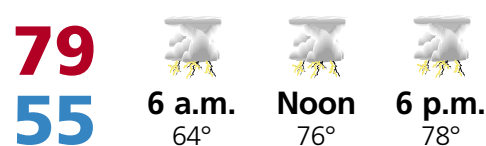
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Thursday



Corrections

The Post-Bulletin is committed to fairness and accuracy. If you have a concern, contact Managing Editor Jay Furst at 285-7742 or furst@postbulletin.com.

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Punchline A2

"He told me to come and see you," said the patient.

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