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'Warrior' Woman



PHOTO: STAFF SGT. PABLO N. PIEDRA
Sgt. Erin VanMaanen of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade is shown competing against U.S. Army Sgt. Bob Hall at the Combatives tournament of the U.S. Army Europe's Best Warrior Competition, held recently in Grafenwoehr, Germany. The competitions challenges participants to prove their skills in military knowledge, leadership and endurance. VanMaanen is a 2005 graduate of Yankton High School.

Yankton Native Shows Her Mettle In Army's 'Best Warrior' Competition

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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At 5-foot-2, Sgt. Erin VanMaanen would be considered petite by most standards — except by her opponents in the "Best Warrior Competition" (BWC) for Europe. The Yankton native recently survived an intense, non-stop competition lasting four days. The event pitted the top nine non-commissioned officers and top nine junior enlisted soldiers in the U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR). They were tested in every phase, from leadership to marksmanship to hand-to-hand combat.

VanMaanen, stationed with the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade in Landstuhl, Germany, competed as the only woman among the nine finalists. She was the smallest, shortest, lightest competitor. She received no breaks — and she wanted none.

"There is not a separate category for females, but a popular saying is 'One team, one fight,'" she said. "It means we are all equal, so we all have to achieve the same standard."

Becoming the best possible warrior is a matter of life or death in a combat situation, VanMaanen said. "A female soldier is a soldier like any other. Bullets don't discriminate," she said.

As an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, VanMaanen showed the ability to hold her own in combat. "A question I was asked on the board (during BWC) was 'What is (your) opinion on the Rangers being opened to females?', as it is soon to be so. I said I was all for it, with the caveat that the standards would not be lowered," she said.

"While certainly some females would be unable to achieve that level of strength and endurance, many more others certainly can. And we should be allowed the same opportunity as males to attain that honor. Lowering the standard would cheapen any victory we would achieve."

The BWC finalists all previously competed to be named the best in their units. They proved their skills in military knowledge, leadership and endurance. USAREUR's winning pair, announced last month, will now compete for honors at the Department of the Army level.

VanMaanen just missed advancing to the final competition for the title of U.S. Army Best Warrior for 2012. The event will be held next month



PHOTO: VISUAL INFORMATION SPECIALIST MARKUS RAUCHENBERGER
Sgt. Erin VanMaanen of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade is shown performing Day Land Navigation during the U.S. Army Europe's Best Warrior Competition, held recently in Grafenwoehr, Germany.

■ "The competition is four days of sleepless nights and extreme physical stress, four days of hell. There were a couple tough moments that brought me to the edge of my physical and mental abilities. Because of that, crossing the finish line for the 10K run on the last night of competition was an incredibly rewarding experience."

SGT. ERIN VANMAANEN

First Dakota Program Offers Help To Beginning Farmers

BY DEREK BARTOS
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Even with years of experience, farming is a demanding job. For those just starting in the profession, it can be overwhelming. To help new farmers get started on the right track, First Dakota National Bank in Yankton has launched its AgriVisions Beginning Farmer program. The four-part event to be held each year features four two-day, educational sessions to provide new farmers with the tools they need to succeed in the business.

"We view it as a way for us to invest in the future of the industry," said Nate Franzen, First Dakota senior vice president and agribusiness division manager. "If ag producers are successful, we know we'll be successful."



Franzen

The program's inaugural class of approximately 30 farmers from throughout the area began its education earlier this year with sessions in finance and marketing. After harvest is completed, farmers will resume the program with sessions covering technology and strategic planning.

"So far it's been going excellent," Franzen said. "I think the beginning farmers are excited about it. I think they're finding a lot of value in it, and I think it's going to continue to build upon itself."

In the first session, the enrolled farmers learned about financial management from various experts in the field, including David Kohl, Virginia Tech agriculture and applied economics professor emeritus; Bob Craven, director of the

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Officials:

High Winds Could Spread Nebraska Fires

Evacuations Continue Near Chadron

BY MARGERY A. BECK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Law enforcement officials went door-to-door Friday asking people south of Chadron in northwest Nebraska to gather their belongings and leave their homes as a growing wildfire threatened to overrun the area.

Officials couldn't say how many people were being evacuated Friday, but more than 150 residents along parts of U.S. Highway 385 were ordered to leave Thursday. Friday's evacuation area was further north on the road. Most of the area is sparsely populated.

At least one house and one farm structure have been destroyed in several fires that were sparked earlier this week by lightning, said Patricia Bean, a spokeswoman for fire operations battling blazes near Chadron and Crawford, and about 350 homes and another 100 structures are being threatened by the fire.

More than 200 firefighters were scrambling Friday to beat back the flames as high, unpredictable winds moved in and brought hotter, drier conditions. The fires have burned more than 122 square miles — an area nearly the size of Omaha, said Nebraska Emergency Management Agency spokeswoman Jodie Fawl.

Fawl said the two largest fires — one south of Chadron and another between Harrison and Crawford — had burned more than 107 square miles by Friday and were only 25 percent contained. Another fire north of Rushville has burned nearly 16 square miles.

Northerly winds had shifted Friday afternoon, now coming from the south and bringing hotter, drier air and gusts stronger than 30 mph that

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XYZ Looks Ahead To Future Of Development In Yankton

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Approximately five years after launching an effort to get younger generations of Yankton residents more involved with economic development, XYZ, Inc., leaders are weighing the direction of the organization's future.

The 501(C)(3) was launched in December 2007 as a vehicle for members of Yankton's X, Y and Z generations to play a more significant role in the community's future development.

It was the brain child of David Hosmer and Dan Specht.

Hosmer is an attorney, as well as a former city commissioner and Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce president. Specht is a realtor and former city commissioner. The organization has changed

since its inception, according to Specht, who is the current president.

"We've evolved," he said. "Things have changed, and we've been trying to learn how to change with the needs of the community. When we first started out, our primary goal was to help young people get engaged in the process of community development, whether it was for business reasons, quality of life reasons, agricultural reasons or something else. It started there. It's gone pretty well, but now we're at the stage of figuring out what are we going to do for the next five years."

The formation of XYZ was announced during a press conference in January 2008 in

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FLOWER POWER



KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Patrick Brewer of the City of Yankton's Parks and Recreation Department is shown watering the plants that are displayed in the downtown district. Brewer said the plants are watered daily. While the drought is taking a toll of a lot of vegetation, the city plants along Third St. will still be holding their colors for today's (Saturday) fifth annual Ribfest. Music and activities start at 11 a.m. and run into the evening.