



Batesville Daily Guard

VOLUME 130, NO. 48 • 22 PAGES

BATESVILLE, ARKANSAS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2006

Serving others 'heroically' can be done every day

By Paul Vitale, special to the Guard

In the minds of those both young and old, the term, "hero" seems to generate a variety of descriptions spanning from superstar athletes to flamboyant actors and actresses to the newest host of the latest and greatest reality show. Million dollar homes, enormous diamond rings, high performance sports cars...and motorcycles to boot. Heroes—some say there are many to look-up-to these days, while others say there are only a few.

One early morning, I was passing through Chicago's Midway Airport when I pulled up a stool at Harry Caray's Restaurant en route to the Southwest Airline's terminal. On this particular day, my final destination was Pittsburgh International. I was traveling to the "Steel City" to speak at a banquet being held during a large sporting event.

At first it was hard concentrating on the breakfast menu with all the various voices echoing throughout the joint. Hung neatly and evenly on the surrounding walls were photos after photos of ball players, local celebrities and politicians—all signed and matted in decorative frames. On top of that, my attention was being drawn to the four plasma televisions positioned strategically for the viewing pleasure of all the patrons.

One television was tuned to a network covering the liftoff of the Discovery Space Shuttle; another was highlighting all the facts about Lance Armstrong's seventh victory at the Tour de France. A third television was covering breaking news in California politics, centered around Governor Schwarzenegger; and the last TV in the far right corner of the restaurant was tuned to a story debating the issue of steroids in baseball. The only quick

decision I was trying to make was pancakes or French toast—let alone which program to watch.

As I sat there, glancing back-and-forth between the televisions, it was hard not to notice others doing the same. Back-and-forth, back-and-forth...one story to the next. That seemed to be the common exercise for me and the others passing through and grabbing a quick bite to eat. "Another fast paced day, with information overload," I mumbled quietly under my breath as I poured syrup evenly across the stack of pancakes I had ordered.

There was one thing different though about this day that caught my attention. Up at the cash register, spelled out in large white block letters was the word "heroes," stretched across the back of a man's shirt who was paying his tab. Underneath the letters H.E.R.O.E.S. was a long list of the names of each fallen firefighter who sacrificed his or her life on 9/11. Finally, a diversion from the bonanza of TV's, I thought to myself...and a profound one at that. "Who are the heroes of today?" Now, there is a good question.

According to the stories spilling over from each television program, "heroes" or better yet, idols and/or champions are quite prevalent in our world today. At least that is how it seems to be presented on most television networks, in numerous electronic stories posted in cyber space and throughout the pages of various magazines and newspapers.

Now, in some cases, I can't argue that fact. Sports heroes such as Armstrong and Favre are remarkable. Their perseverance, discipline and pure guts are rightly noted. Not to mention the courageous astronauts who've lived

with the deep passion of exploration and discovery throughout their lives. Politicians and activists who have stood on their core beliefs and principles—yes, some of their names have earned a place in the same sentence with the word "hero."

However, in the world in which we live today, it is becoming ever more evident that many of our real "heroes" have never graced the front cover of a magazine, or had a press conference held in their honor. People who don't have access to great wealth or material possessions, nonetheless, have enormous hearts. No, these "heroes" or better yet, idols and/or champions might not be as prevalent on the flat-screen, but always seem to be working within the shadows of others.

The hospice worker who prepares a family for a loved one's death; a school teacher who spends countless hours instructing our future generations; the men and women who so proudly wear the uniforms of our armed forces and place themselves in the midst of harm's way each and every day; community action groups, who make sure people aren't discriminated against in the workforce; young kids who join together to raise money for relief efforts when natural disasters hit our country hard; every human being who has ever gone out of their way to be kind to the lonely, less fortunate and beaten down. The way I see it, these people are "heroes" too. Maybe they're not front and center, and again maybe they are. Either way, the names of these brave people belong in the same sentence as those icons whose stories spill from the television screen.

Who are the heroes of today?

Good question. I'm of the opinion all of us have heroic qualities. Just think of the opportunities we are afforded on a daily basis. When a colleague drops a stack of paper on the floor, help pick it up; allow the people seated in front of you to exit the plane first, before rushing past them. When someone in a wheelchair is attempting to get on an elevator, hold the door for them; offer your place in line at the grocery store, if you notice someone in a total rush; merge...please allow other motorists to merge.

You may ask; what does all of this have to do with heroes? It seems to be common sense sprinkled in with a dash of common courtesy. Well, if it was just that simple. "Heroes" answer the call both big and small. Their inner-qualities hold them to the greatest level of accountability—both when people are watching and when they're not. As long as there is air to breathe, each and every one of us has the distinct pleasure of serving others "heroically." For it's this kind of action that has the greatest impact on mankind.

Yes, there will always be the million dollar homes, enormous diamond rings and high performance sports cars. News organizations will continue to focus on the superstars and the not-so-super. In the end though, all of us will be remembered for our contribution to the world and its people. As significant or insignificant as that might seem, that's what our name will be attached to—heroic or not. "Holy Cow!" Just think about the name on the front door of the restaurant where I choose to pull up a stool on this particular morning.

Copyright © 2006
Vital Communications, Inc.