

Hundreds welcome 134th back to Rochester

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A gold sign exclaiming the slogan, "Now, it's Miller Time," and emblazoned with the names of the members of the 134th Maintenance Company hung behind Francis and Angelina Pearson in the New York Army National Guard Armory, 145 Culver Road.

The Pearsons, who attend Holy Cross Church, 4492 Lake Ave., anxiously sat awaiting the return of their grandson, Sergeant John Alford, who was due to arrive any minute at the armory Wednesday afternoon, July 3, along with about 140 other members of the 134th.

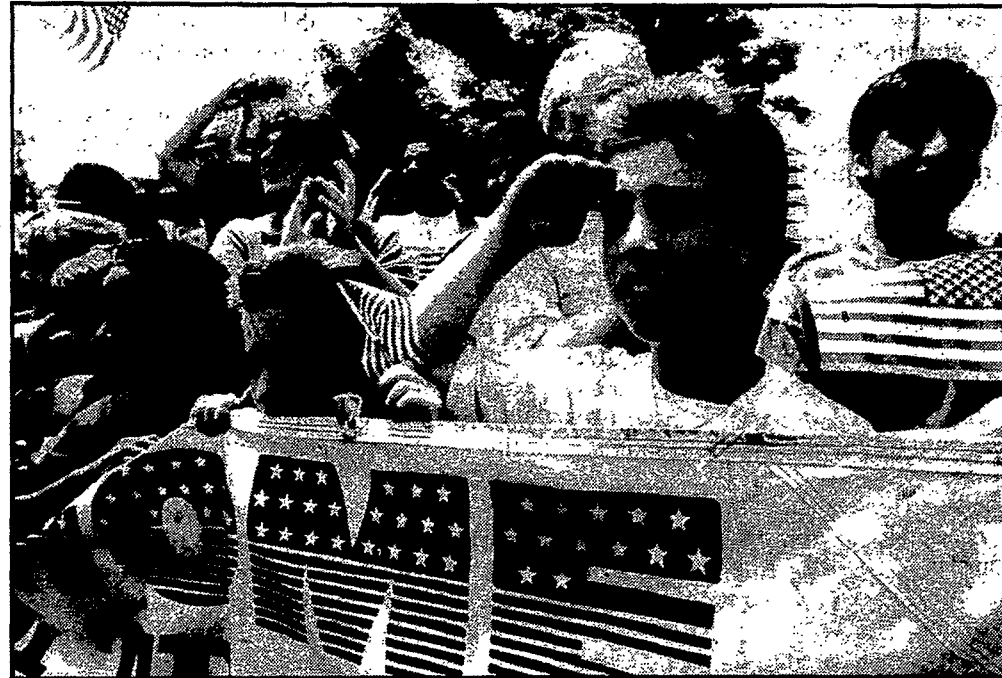
"When this started, I thought it was going to be a real, real big thing," commented Francis Pearson about the Persian Gulf War. He added that it "was just God's blessing" that the six-week war ended as quickly as it did.

Those sentiments summed up the feelings of many of the hundreds of families and their relatives in the 134th as they celebrated the unit's return home from Saudi Arabia. Members of the company traveled to the gulf region last January after they were called up to active duty before last Thanksgiving.

The company trained at Fort Dix, N.J., for two months before going to Saudi Arabia a few days before the war started Jan. 16. Upon its return to the United States, the 134th spent a week at Fort Drum in Watertown before making its way to the armory last week. Some members of the unit had returned to the United States in May.

Inside the armory, the soldiers' loved ones waved flags and banners while a band made up of members from the U.S. Army Reserve's 98th Division offered up spirited renditions of military songs just before the troops returned.

Upon the arrival of the soldiers, people inside the armory cheered, embraced, kissed and saluted the gulf war veterans, who



Phillip Archer/Photo intern

Above, Cub Scouts from Rochester's Den 6 salute as a bus carrying members of the 134th Maintenance Company arrives at New York Army National Guard Armory in Rochester July 3. Below, Sergeant Donald A. Marsh embraces his father, Alan E. Marsh, of North Chili. The 134th served with allied forces in the Persian Gulf war.

were clad in tan camouflaged uniforms.

The troops quickly broke ranks as they became overwhelmed by the onslaught of affection from their relatives and friends.

Specialist Rose Ciatelli, a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, 1095 Joseph Ave., joked that she was "still not quite here," as her family and friends greeted her.

"I thought it was going to be longer," she said. Although she was glad the war was over, Ciatelli admitted that she was still unhappy that Saddam Hussein remained in power.

"I kind of wish we had kept going and taken care of him," she said. "I don't want to go back there in a couple of years."

Specialist Eric Alvarado expressed his



Black educator takes college position

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Gaynelle Wethers, an African-American, seems to have lived her life as one long attempt to move from the back of the segregated Catholic Church she experienced in Louisiana to the forefront of an integrated church in her adopted city.

Wethers recently resigned as principal of St. Monica's School, 841 Genesee St., to take a position as director of minority affairs at Nazareth College. In her new post, Wethers will be in charge of recruiting minority staff and students.

The former principal has come a long way since her childhood in New Orleans. She recalled a time when she was separated from white Catholics every time she went to church in the 1950s and 1960s.

"I sat in the back of the church until I came here in 1971," she said. "The church was heavily racist."

Despite the prejudice she experienced growing up, Wethers grew to love the church through one of its orders — the all-black Sisters of the Holy Family. The order was founded in New Orleans in 1842 by freeborn African-American women who wanted to take care of abandoned elderly slaves and orphaned children.

Attending a school run by the Holy Family sisters, Wethers noted that she learned discipline and dedication. The sisters called upon her and her schoolmates to help keep the school running by assigning cleaning tasks. She also recalled helping to cut eucharistic hosts from communion bread.

Wethers carried over the sisters' philosophy of making the students participate in school life when she was named principal of St. Monica's in 1984. "When they (the

students) clean something, it gives them a sense of self-worth," Wethers said. She added that students who find academic work difficult and get low grades can at least point to a successful cleaning task and say: "I completed a job."

Wethers has completed many a job on behalf of the diocese. The first black school principal in the history of the diocese, Wethers developed a variety of measures to enhance her students' lives. From scholarship programs instituted with the help of area black and Catholic professionals to increased involvement of local police in keeping the streets around St. Monica's safe, Wethers put much of her energy into improving the learning environment of her students.

Her position at St. Monica's was only the latest in a series of jobs that brought her in constant contact with the city's Catholic and African-American communities.

After moving to Rochester in 1971 — when her husband took a job with a Rochester-area company — Wethers taught at Immaculate Conception School. She left Immaculate Conception in 1974 — a year before it closed — when she took a position in the Rush-Henrietta School District. She still remained active in parish life at Immaculate, however, as she coordinated the parish's religious-education program in the late 1970s.

Wethers made her students' activities an integral part of the parish's life, she said.

"We had enrollment ceremonies as part of the (Sunday) liturgy," she said. "The children realized that they were part of the community, that they were not isolated."

Wethers pursued her own educational career in the 1970s and 1980s, studying for master's degrees in administration and di-

vinity.

Yet when she returns to college this summer, Wethers will walk the halls as an administrator and not as a student. She hopes to serve as a role model for young African-Americans looking to enter the academic and professional life.

Noting the growing murder rate involving minorities in the United States, Wethers wants to encourage more successful blacks to think about serving their own communities.

"Making a lot of money to me is not important," she said. "Saving the lives in our community is."

concern that Saddam was still in power in Iraq. A parishioner of Corpus Christi Church, 864 E. Main St., Alvarado talked about his experiences in the Persian Gulf War during an interview at his home on Sunday, July 7.

Donning an "Operation Desert Storm" T-shirt, Alvarado expressed worry over recent reports concerning the Iraqi leader's attempts to deny foreign inspectors access to his nuclear and chemical weapons-producing facilities. Alvarado said he had second thoughts about President George Bush's decision not to send allied forces all the way to Baghdad back in February.

"I wish they would have gone after (Saddam) directly," Alvarado said. "If they have to call us back, I have no choice but to go back."

And at this moment, Alvarado has little desire to go back to the hot Saudi Arabian desert. The resident of Seventh Street in the city pointed out that day-to-day existence in Saudi Arabia was a constant struggle to keep cool. But although his commanders kept telling him to drink six to eight gallons of water every day, Alvarado found he only had to drink one or two gallons to keep himself from dehydrating.

The gulf soldier began his work day in Saudi Arabia at 8 a.m., spending most of his time fixing the canvas material on trucks and tents, he said. Alvarado noted that working on the canvas material wasn't always an easy task given how hot the material became in the blazing sun.

"I just kept throwing water on myself," he recalled.

While Congress, the president and the American public weighed arguments over whether to allow economic sanctions against Iraq to continue or to attack Saddam's forces in Kuwait, Alvarado said his military colleagues wanted to get rid of the Iraqi threat as quickly as possible.

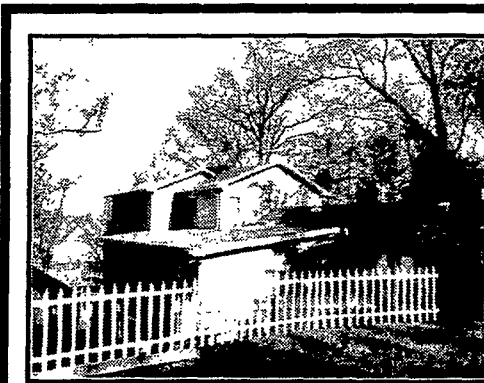
"Let's get in and get it over as fast as we can and come back as fast as we can" marked the attitude of many of the soldiers in Saudi Arabia, Alvarado said.

Although fear was an undercurrent of life during the war, the guardsman remembered only one time in which he experienced the war close at hand. He was stationed at "Camp Jack" in northeast Saudi Arabia at the time.

"The only thing I got to see was the Patriot (U.S. missiles) taking off and hitting some of the Scuds (Iraqi missiles)," he said.

Now that he is back, Alvarado insists that no one sees him any differently because he participated in the war.

"I don't really consider myself a hero," he said. "I just don't want the people to treat me differently because of the war. I just want to come back to the good, normal life."



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