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Wednesday, February 14, 2007



COLD CRAFT – William Rose of the Ice Sculpturing Team of Eastern Michigan University puts the final touches to an ice sculpture of Pegasus at the 7th Annual Colio Estate Wines Festival of Ice Saturday. For the story and additional photos, please turn to page 8.

Welcome home soldier

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Three months ago, Mike Barnewall was in a European hospital bed recovering from the land mine explosion that took his right foot and mangled his right arm and hand.

He was flown there from a field hospital in Afghanistan, where a short distance away in the Panjwaii district Cpl. Barnewall was on foot patrol with the Canadian Military escorting engineers through an area known as "Ambush Alley."

The device he stepped on was rigged to explode with two mortar shells, causing severe shrapnel wounds and cutting short his tour of duty in the war-torn country.

On Saturday, for the first time since his return in November, family and friends came together at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 201 to welcome home the Essex-born soldier and wish him a speedy recovery.

"I don't like being the centre of attention," Barnewall admitted. "But it's a good thing because it's everybody that I know. I sat down and immediately people came up to say some words."

Fitted with a temporary prosthesis on his leg, the 26-year-old said he is still adjusting to life after the injury.

"I'm getting used to it," Barnewall said. "There's

pressure in strange spots. The balance is a big thing. Without ankle tendons, balance is a bit of an issue."

For now, Barnewall will be staying with his parents in Kingsville before heading back to the Canadian military base in Petawawa, Ont. in the spring to finish his military contract.

Until then, he will most likely undergo another temporary prosthesis replacement and continue therapy to recover the full use of his damaged right hand.

Barnewall's father Dave said the most important thing at this point is for his son to get back to some normality.

Dave organized the open house along with legion volunteers as a way to say thanks for the outpouring of concern, love and prayers that have helped in Mike's recovery.

"I'm happy for Mike this is happening," Dave said. "I think my son deserves it. We're very proud of him."

So are the dozens of supporters who greeted Mike, shaking his hand and giving him hugs.

"It's good having him home," said friend Dave Orton, who's known Mike since grade school. "When he was over there, I thought about him a lot. I was fully aware of what was going on. It doesn't leave your mind."

SEE DOZENS, PAGE 2

County residents facing tax increase

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Essex County homeowners may be hit with a 1.9 percent tax increase, or an added \$14.85 per year for a home valued at \$200,000, according to council's 2007 budget presentation Feb. 7.

About \$62.2 million of the budget will be raised through taxes, an increase of about \$2.1 million from last year.

Public opinion is being sought before the \$115.9 million budget is brought back to county council for approval Feb. 21.

Warden Nelson Santos said county council recognizes the pressures to improve the delivery of serv-

ices and build a stronger infrastructure.

But unfulfilled provincial commitments has put added pressure on the county to deliver more funding for health care, particularly in land ambulance services and long term care facilities.

So far, the county has only received one-third of a pre-election commitment from the province that would see \$6,000 go toward the care of each resident of a long-term care facility.

Santos also said the province has fallen short on its promise to cover 50 percent of costs related to ambulance services.

SEE TAX, PAGE 5

ERCA approves \$13.5 million budget

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Water quality protection, the development of two conservation areas and a continuation of its 200,000 plus tree planting initiative were some of the items included in the Essex Region Conservation Authority's \$13.5 million budget that was approved last week.

A total municipal tax levy of \$2.3 million is outlined in the budget, representing an increase of \$61,600 from last year. But each dollar raised through the levy is matched by an additional \$4.77 from other sources, including the federal and

provincial governments, independent landowners and non-government organizations.

This means for a home valued at \$200,000, about \$13 would go toward environmental improvements in the region, representing a per-household reduction of nearly 35 cents.

The 2007 budget and business plan were distributed to each municipality in December, and outlined ERCA's goal of increasing the amount of wetlands and forest cover in the county from seven percent to 12 percent in the next few years.

SEE ENVIRONMENTAL, PAGE 3



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