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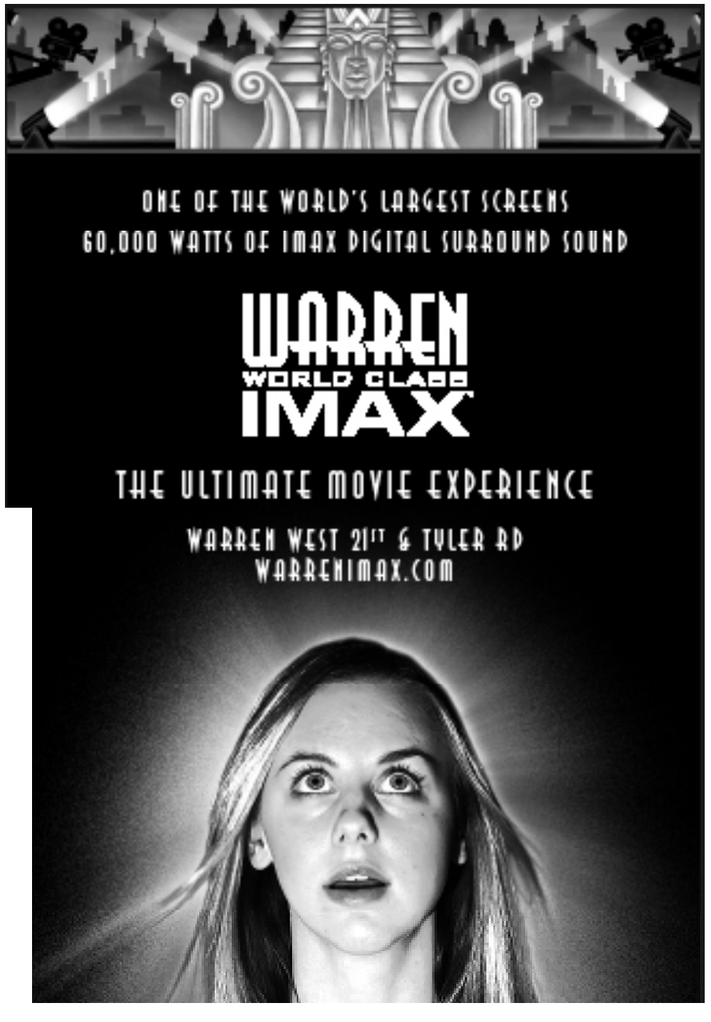

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Senior Zack Griffith is in the Army Reserve. DAGNY CASTELLI

Lives touched by the military

By Dagny Castelli

Many Maize students and staff are affected by the military. These people have a special insight for what it means to serve our country.

Freshman Shania Burkhead's father is in the Navy Reserve and has been deployed to Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and still goes to Japan every few months. Her brother is also in the Navy and is stationed in Hawaii.

Burkhead said she misses her brother very much, because she's always been close to him.

"I miss them both a lot. It's hard not knowing if they're going to be safe or when they're coming home," she said.

Burkhead said that the military has taught her something.

"I respect the people that go out and fight for our country a lot more," she said.

Like Burkhead, sisters Alicia Duggins, junior, and Jessika Duggins, freshman, have been in a similar situation. About four years ago their father was deployed to Kuwait. He is a commander in the Army National Guard and got to see his family only a couple of times while overseas.

"It was really tough," Jessika said.

Alicia said the experience of her father's deployment was most difficult on her mom.

"She didn't know how she was going to raise us without him," Alicia said.

The Duggins family moves around a lot. About four years ago, the family moved on base at Fort Leavenworth.

"We were surrounded by families a lot like ours," Alicia said. "They understood. It was really nice to meet some people like that. That's really when I started to care about school and think about my future. I wasn't a very social person before, but that changed."

The Duggins sisters support their dad and feel pride in his involvement with the military.

"I'm really proud of my dad," Alicia said. "I look up to him and aspire to be like him. I think I would be a much different person with different goals if I didn't have this kind of dad."

Stiverson to depart

Teacher and coach Jamie Stiverson will be deployed to Afghanistan in August. Stiverson is in the Army National Guard, and he will be overseas for nine months to a year. He will be on an ADT mission, working with security forces and a security platoon.

"I've wanted to be in the military since 2002, but I didn't enlist until 2010. I wanted to serve and do my part," Stiverson said.

Stiverson said he is preparing himself physically and mentally, and also getting ready for the separation from his four children – Jordan, 19; Jacob, 17; Hailey, 10; and Jaidyn, 5.

"The biggest impact is going to be on my daughters, just because they're so young," Stiverson said. "They'll miss me and be upset for a while."

Stiverson said he is not afraid, but most anxious about improvised explosive devices, or roadside bombs. He is excited to put his training into use.

"This will be my first deployment," Stiverson said. "I'll actually be able to use the training that I've learned."

Stiverson said he is proud to serve his country.

"It's kind of showed me that I can actually do more than what I thought I could," Stiverson said.

Stiverson plans to return to Maize to teach and coach once he is released from the Army.

'Training was hard'

Senior Zack Griffith has been in the Army Reserve for more than a year. Griffith said he enlisted because he is third-generation military and wants to serve his country. Also, Griffith wants a stable job with benefits.

Griffith said being in the military while still in high school is very hard.

"It affects who I'm allowed to date and how I can voice my opinion in certain classes," Griffith said. "Plus, I have to miss a good amount of school. On top of schoolwork, the Army also gives us online classes we must take."

Griffith went through basic training last summer and will finish training this year. He spent last summer in South Carolina.

"Training was hard," Griffith said. "The heat index some days would be 130, and we would still keep going with our equipment on."

Griffith said the military has taught him a lot, such as respecting others. He said many soldiers come back from deployment with scars and deformities and that has been the most touching.

He was supposed to be deployed to Afghanistan after graduation but recently was taken off the deployment roster.

"When I was still on the roster, I was actually excited to go," Griffith said. "I guess it was a pride thing. Actually getting to go and serve in a combat area seems awesome to me. But then again, I'm an adrenaline junky." ■