

Defenders of Freedom

The Mountaintop's new Marine Corps League

By Michael Ryan

Windham Journal Staff Writer

WINDHAM - One distinguished member of the Mountaintop Detachment #1274 Marine Corps League was noticeably absent during a Charter presentation to the group, held last week.

Derrick Holdridge, a Windham-Ashland-Jewett graduate, is currently on his second tour of duty in Iraq after also serving in Afghanistan in the war on terrorism.

Holdridge, the son of Les and Velina Holdridge, was obviously unable to attend the local gathering, although he was in the thoughts of his comrades and is regularly in touch with his family.

"He calls us about once a week," says his father, noting Derrick spoke recently about the death of a close friend killed in action in the continuing ground struggle.

It is for men and women like Holdridge and his fallen compatriot that Mountaintop Detachment #1274 was started, inviting all Marines and Fleet Marine Force (Navy) medics to join.

"We're here to look out for Marines in distress and pro-

vide support for any family members who may need assistance," says Detachment #1274 commandant Roy A. Mower.

The local chapter was formed earlier this year, gaining formal recognition during an organization meeting last Wednesday night at the James F. Carty VFW Post in Windham.

George Nealon, the Marine Corps League east area vice-commandant, travelled to the mountaintop to make the presentation, along with past national commandant Robert Becker.

Affiliation with the national association brings Detachment #1274 into an 88-year-old brotherhood and sisterhood that holds 68,000 members nationwide.

The Marine Corps League lists as one of its primary duties celebrating the birth of the United States Marine Corps, which dates back to 1775, Nealon said.

Marines have earned a reputation as fearless and reliable defenders of America, wearing the responsibility proudly and even after retirement helping their communities with peaceable pursuits.

Detachment #1274 has wasted no time reaching out, recently donating items to the Capital District's Stratton VA Medical Center and establishing a charitable framework.

"Toys for Tots" will be an immediate focus, raising funds to distribute needy children's gifts with attention also given to the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, handicapped individuals and others.

Commandant Mower, who served as a guerilla warfare trainer in the Viet Nam era, said attaining Charter status means a great deal to the local chapter.

"There's so much we want to do," Mower said. "This gives us the backing of the national organization and enables us to seek support from our friends and neighbors."

The new Charter was offered "in memory of those Marines who by their deeds and heroism set the standard that is our guide today," Nealon stated, carrying on the tradition.

Detachment #1274 officers and members include Bob Barnum (senior vice-commandant), Chris Ferguson (junior vice-commandant),





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Symbolic cutting of the Charter presentation cake is performed by Mountaintop Detachment #1274 Marine Corps League commandant Roy A. Mower, brandishing a Marine officer's sword. Mower is assisted by the local group's oldest member, Ed Rogers, a World War II veteran, and its youngest member, Tracey Helmedach, a reservist. The icing on the cake includes the words "Semper Fi," a shortened version of "Semper Fidelis," stating the Marine Corps motto "God, Corps and Country."

dant), Nick Russo (judge advocate), Rich Rappleyea (adjutant);

Mike Avella (paymaster), James Scarey (chaplain), Joe Dacunto (sergeant at arms),

Robert Partridge (chief of staff), John Bryson, Bud Decker, Craig DeLong, Ron DeLong, Anthony Moon;

Roy S. Mower, Tom Poelker, William Sutton, Ed

Rogers, Joe Matuscsak, Tracey Helmedach and Steve Richards. Call Mower at (518) 734-3853 for information on membership and contributions.



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Charter is presented to the Mountaintop Detachment #1274 Marine Corps League during an organization meeting held, last week, at the James F. Carty VFW Post in Windham. Taking part in the group's official recognition are (left to right) George