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'A way out of the hard times'

Lake Forest's Jahari Scott sees football as a route to college. Sports, Page 11

JEFF KRAGE / PIONEER PRESS 2019

'I would go again in an instant'

It's easy to ignore what's taking place in Afghanistan, unless you've been there



Jerry Davich

John Masson sent me a one-word text Saturday morning: "Afghanistan." He didn't have to say another word. I knew how he felt about the shocking collapse of that country's U.S.-trained military and its ripple effect into chaos this past weekend. I also knew why it angers and saddens him. Masson, a U.S. Army Ranger medic from Lake Station, left three of his limbs and part of his heart in Afghanistan. In 2010, he stepped on a hidden improvised explosive device while clearing a village compound with his Special Forces unit. I replied to his text: "John, I've been thinking of you and your sacrifices there ... for what now exactly?" Masson replied: "For what you ask? For that beautiful blanket of security we

Turn to Davich, Page 2

Duckworth tours Midwest Veterans Closet

Senator promises to continue support for 'God's work' it does

By Yadira Sanchez Olson
For News-Sun

U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth visited the North Chicago-based Midwest Veterans Closet on Saturday. Duckworth toured the nonprofit organization that provides food, clothing, furniture and housewares at no cost, and is a support system to local veterans and active duty members. Midwest Veterans Closet founder Mary Carmody showed Duckworth the location where the organization operates its pantry

Turn to Closet, Page 3



U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., tours the Midwest Veterans Closet in North Chicago on Saturday. YADIRA SANCHEZ OLSON/NEWS-SUN



Hundreds of people run alongside a U.S. Air Force C-17 transport plane Monday as it moves down a runway of the international airport, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghans rushed onto the tarmac, desperate to escape the Taliban capture of their country. UGC

Gurnee native nearly swept away in German flood



Charles Selle

Growing up in Gurnee, Teresa Osmera Buchmann was used to the Des Plaines River flooding the town from time to time. Those experiences did not prepare her for what she and her family went through last month, as raging

floodwaters inundated her small German community. It's been a month since the Ahr River valley, 20 miles south of Bonn, was deluged by heavy rain and subsequent destruction. The picturesque vineyard-cloaked vale ended up being under 32 feet of muddy water. That left Buchmann, 38, husband Roger, 36, and 3-year-old daughter Clara stranded for some 13 hours in the attic of their three-story home. Their backyard is 50 yards from the Ahr River in the

village of Altenahr. At one point, Buchmann said she thought she was going to die and called her mother, Elsie, who now lives in Lake Villa. Not so worried about the height of the rising water, she was more concerned for the stability of the home, the oldest on her street, Seilbahn Strasse, built in the 1950s. Heavily damaged, the home "is amazingly still structurally safe" and remains the last one standing on the street. The rest were torn down because of instability

caused by the floodwaters. "They have said that what we survived is the worst flooding ever in Germany," she wrote in an email. More than 120 people died in her valley after being swept away by the swollen river. "The estimate amount of damage is in the billions, not just affecting houses, but also business, infrastructure and schools," she added. "The support and generosity of most people in this aftermath has been overwhelming."

For Buchmann, it's been a long journey to Germany. She settled in Western Europe after meeting her German husband in Poland in 2011. Since 2014, the couple have run a bed-and-breakfast, Auf dem Land in the countryside on the ground floor of their home, in the region known for its tourist appeal and pinot noir vineyards. Prior to the flood, she said a few people from the Gurnee area were able to visit. "That made me

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Tom Skilling's forecast High 85 Low 68

Chicago Weather Center: Forecast on back page

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Clotet

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and free store at 2323 Green Bay Road.

Following the tour, Duckworth was greeted with a warm reception at the organization's new location at 1720 Green Bay Road where families gathered around a cookout, next to a garden tended by volunteers.

The reason for Duckworth's visit was to have a roundtable discussion with active service members, as well as veterans and their families about food insecurity, which they said they and others face regularly.

"It's wrong," Duckworth said. "It's a dishonor to all of us that anyone who wears this nation's cloth is hungry, or their family is hungry."

To combat the issue, Carmody and her team of volunteers provided 372,000 pounds of food last year at the 300-square-foot food pantry.

The hope is to raise \$2 million to build a structure that can house a bigger pantry at the new location, which is land that was



U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth shakes the hand of World War II veteran Lorraine Knuth at an event in North Chicago Saturday. The Waukegan resident celebrated her 100th birthday in October. **YADIRA SANCHEZ OLSON/NEWS-SUN**

secured with the help of retired state Sen. Terry Link, she said.

The new construction would house a pantry, store, furniture warehouse and commercial kitchen. It would also allow the organization to stop paying rent at the current building, so that more money goes to the

services offered.

All donations given to the Midwest Veterans Closet are free of charge to veterans, and active duty members and their families.

Carmody said many can't believe they can furnish their home and stock their refrigerators and pantries when they visit.

"It's why people donate to us," she said. "They know it all goes to our veterans."

The larger building will have enough space for several families to get their food at once at the pantry.

"Anyone who says there is no food insecurity should drive by in the middle of winter to see the line of veterans standing outside the pantry in the freezing cold waiting for their turn come in," Carmody said.

By working with Izzy Kharasch, who is known as co-founder and co-producer of the show "Bar Rescue," the Midwest Veterans Closet is planning to start a culinary education program.

Kharasch explained to Duckworth that by using the commercial kitchen as an education center, the focus would be on training veterans who can't find employment in culinary or hospitality work.

Duckworth inquired whether the program could also help those currently serving get a certificate or licensure that is the civilian equivalent of the job they're

doing in the military.

That's an issue she's been working on for quite some time, although it's been a slow-moving process, she said.

Kharasch agreed it would be a great benefit.

While serving the country, he worked in food inspection and would have taken advantage of such a program, he said.

"When I left the military and went to culinary school, they didn't accept any of my credits — six years of military training in that industry," Kharasch said.

Once established, even military spouses could participate, they said.

Another project in the works in partnership with Kharasch is to assist in the making of business owners.

Navy veteran Luis Galvez, of Waukegan, who was one of the cooks Saturday, is hoping to develop a unique salsa that can be sold in farmers markets and eventually in grocery stores.

Healthier food options at military bases was also brought up in the discus-

sion, as well as the creation of healthy meal kits that busy active duty families could access.

Duckworth shook the hand of centenarian and World War II veteran Lorraine Knuth, who used the occasion of her birthday last year to fundraise for the building's construction.

Carmody said thanks to Knuth, \$30,000 were raised.

Duckworth met and spoke with Gold Star mother of U.S. Army Ranger Specialist Joey Dimock.

Ellen Dimock of Grayslake gifted Duckworth a bracelet in her son's honor, which she immediately put on her wrist.

"It's a privilege to get to wear it," Duckworth said.

Duckworth's visit lasted an hour. Before leaving she posed for photos and promised to have her staff look into individual issues of families who shared kinks in the system that are keeping them from receiving their benefits.

She pledged to do anything she can to help the Midwest Veterans Closet continue to provide services, which she called "God's work."

Selle

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happy. I was also surprised how many of our former guests contacted us to ask if we were OK and donate money."

That, she said, showed that even in the short time they were open, and with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the B&B was a successful venture. "Our bed-and-breakfast will not reopen in the foreseeable future.

"Hopefully, someday we can rebuild the beautiful life we once had," Buchmann said. "Honestly, we do not know what the future will bring for us. If we stay in the valley is to be seen.

"We were very happy there and loved our neighbors like family," she added. "We do love the beautiful area for nature, wine and hiking and are definitely country people so wherever we end up it will be in the

country."

The Buchmanns currently are living in a student apartment in Bonn and hoping to move this week to a small house close to where they used to live. They can stay there for free for six months.

The family expects funding help for rebuilding from the German government. "How much is yet to be seen, but more answers are expected in September."

Perhaps because of the well-known German penchant for order, Buchmann said a month after the flood, "I am surprised, how organized and clean things look already. However, the initial frenzy is also over which sometimes makes the area feel like a ghost town."

German officials are investigating why the valley wasn't alerted to the severity of the rising Ahr waters headed toward the town on July 14, and what more could have been done to warn residents of the

danger.

Hampering recovery efforts is that only roughly 40% of the people in the valley had expensive flood insurance, she said, which is not seen as necessary by most — including the Buchmanns — because the flooding was never so extreme. That included a 100-year flood in 2016, when the Ahr River also overflowed its banks. At their website, www.auf-dem-land.com, you can see the once-idyllic area, the Buchmanns' B&B and their home.

The vast amount of destruction is hard to imagine from afar. The Buchmanns realize it will take years before things really return to what their life had been. Yet they remain hopeful after the coronavirus epidemic and an epic flood, normal will return.

Charles Selle is a former News-Sun reporter, political editor and editor.

sellenews@gmail.com



Ahr River floats past destroyed houses July 15 in Insul, Germany. Because of heavy rain falls the Ahr river dramatically went over the banks the evening before. **MICHAEL PROBST/AP**



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