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Students learn about Lima Company Worthington woman presents memorial project to Heritage Middle School

By **SETH ROY**

Advocate Reporter

NEWARK -- Anita Miller woke up in October 2005 with a vision: She had dreamed of a memorial dedicated to fallen troops in Iraq.

More specifically, Miller said Friday at Heritage Middle School, she saw life-size portraits of the 22 Marines and Navy Corpsman of Lima Company, third battalion, 25th Regiment who had died in Iraq that year.



Miller presented the idea behind the Lima Company Memorial to Heritage's students Friday and answered their questions.

"This memorial is to honor these guys and their sacrifice," she said. "This is not political."

Heritage Middle School brought Miller to speak because one the mothers of one Heritage student helps raise money for the project.

When it is finished, the soldiers will be painted on eight panels, which will sit in an octagon.

Ever-lasting candles will sit in front of the paintings, as will a pair of boots for each soldier.

The memorial will be on display at the Statehouse from Memorial Day until Veterans Day in 2008, after which it will travel to other states.

Miller, of Worthington, said she has no connection to anyone in the war, let alone the Lima Company, but she wanted to help in some way.

"My heart was just breaking for those families," she said. "If God could show me some way to ease those hearts, then (I would do that)."

Family members of the soldiers, as well as their friends, have helped Miller by submitting pictures and telling their sons' stories.

With the help of one soldier's mother, biographies of each will also travel with the memorial, Miller said.

After a lot of planning and sketching, Miller started painting in January. She has finished six of the panels and still needs to paint seven portraits on the two remaining canvases.

They are life-size, stretching up to a 6-foot-6-inch soldier.

"So when you're standing with them, you can feel like you're with the men," Miller said.

When she was done with a presentation in the gym, Miller answered questions for a group of sixth-graders.

Twelve-year-old Haroon Khan said he enjoyed the presentation and enjoyed learning about the Lima Company.

"It was an exciting and amazing program," he said.

While answering questions for the students, the topic of post-traumatic stress disorder was brought up.

One soldier in the battalion had survived, while all of his friends died.

Drew Dunsford, 12, said she could understand why he would have a difficult time going home.

"I'd feel like I should be there (in Iraq) with them," she said.

Another student asked Miller about the boots that sit in front of each portrait.

"A lot of the guys, they were blown up (and their boots were lost)," Miller said. "Sometimes, we have the boots, and (the families) are willing to share them."

Other boots are being collected with the help of other soldiers and friends of the Lima Company soldiers who died.

