

Sanctuary City for Soldiers

Group promotes refuge for war objectors

BY CHARITY PRATER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Imagine Portland acting as a Sanctuary City where soldiers and war veterans opposed to returning to active duty could live peacefully while transitioning back to civilian life.

Brian Barnett and Dan Shea are working together to open the door for conversations about just an idea this Memorial Day weekend, Saturday, May 26 at 7 p.m. at north Portland's Bread and Roses Center.

Around the country, there is a growing movement of soldiers who are reaching a consensus that the war in Iraq is a fallacy. Soldiers like Kevin Benderman, Sarah Olson, Carl Webb, and others are refusing deployment, going AWOL, or sim-

ply refusing to fight for one reason or another.

The anti-war movement is also growing in such strength that many students at colleges and universities around the country have joined together to drive army and military recruiters from their buildings and lawns.

According to Shea, a Vietnam Veteran who lost a child to war in 1981, last year alone there were more than 3,000 active-duty soldiers who deserted the army.

"Some soldiers refuse to deploy on the basis that they are being

asked to commit an international crime because the war is illegal," says Shea, "Others, like Suzanne Swift, refuse to return for more personal reasons like sexual crimes or mental health concerns."

While the paperwork is processing, where do these soldiers live, work and receive healthcare? Many of them do not have any safe refuge because they have warrants out for their arrest for refusing to deploy. They are persecuted by their colleagues and officers, or they are

continued ▼ on page A8

Some soldiers refuse to deploy on the basis that they are being asked to commit an international crime because the war is illegal.



PHOTO BY CHARITY PRATER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A passer-by walks past a political statement chalked onto the sidewalk in front of the U.S. Army Recruiting Center on Northeast Broadway.

Sanctuary City for Soldiers Wanted

continued ▲ *from Front*

being threatened by others.

"These women and men have a right to live a public life, have access to healthcare, find work, get an education, play in the park with their families, and live like other civilians while they are going through the process of being released from duty," says Barnett. "Sometimes, it can take years for the paperwork to be processed by the government."

The Strike Against War: Build a

Rose City Refuge for G.I. Resistance Forum is providing a simple solution to the problems that these soldiers face by introducing the idea of making Portland a Sanctuary City.

"There needs to be a neutral place where these people can live even if it is symbolic," says Shea. "And Portland is the perfect city to help provide a resolution for these social issues."

Soldier sanctuaries are nothing new. They date back to the Vietnam War and, even today, churches,

even some local ones, provide safety for fleeing servicemen.

The forum will provide meaningful discussions and conversations, and build a common goal within the community. All the while, speakers will be present, volunteers will be helping with the event, and food will be donated from local restaurants.

Donations will go to support the Freedom Socialist Newspaper that supports the movement.

"Our goal is to find ways to support the soldiers who are speaking

out and refusing to deploy," says Barnett. "We want to build strength within the community that will allow soldiers to come out from the underground and also we would like to get a political discussion going."

"The idea is to plant a seed and let it grow," says Shea. "Immigrants have been able to build sanctuaries, why can't our own soldiers?"

For more information, to get involved, or to donate, you can contact Dan Shea at 503-975-4160 or 503-661-1317.