

# Salute to our Troops

The Beacon Journal honors those from the Akron area serving in the armed forces.

A8-A9



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# Iraqis try to move on with lives

Former finance minister arrested. 4 troops hurt on patrol. Residents seek normalcy in wake of fighting

Knight Ridder Newspapers

**BAGHDAD, Iraq:** Iraq's capital got its first postwar newspaper on Saturday, published by the Communist Party, and Marines didn't shoot when a car backfired. In Basra, doctors are treating more feuding neighbors and car crash victims and fewer people wounded in the war.

Gunfire still sometimes echoes in the night, and while children and older Iraqis wave playfully at U.S. and British troops, many young men turn their faces away when a military convoy passes them.

But slowly, like a swimmer testing the water before diving in, most of Iraq's main cities are returning to some level of normalcy 12 days after major fighting ended with the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The mood reflects the ambivalence of many Iraqis over their situation - rid of a brutal dictator but now occupied by U.S. and British troops and facing an uncertain future of internal ethnic, tribal and religious tensions.

Some isolated pockets of armed resistance still remain.

U.S. troops outside Baghdad imposed a 7 p.m. curfew for the first time Saturday night, with

### America at WAR

#### Developments:

- Seven former U.S. prisoners of war arrive to cheers in El Paso, Texas.
- Iraqi police arrest the former finance minister of Saddam Hussein.
- The man known as the mastermind of Iraq's nerve agent program turns himself in to coalition authorities.

#### War stories

Syria agrees to tighten visa restrictions on Iraqi travelers. **Story, Page A12**  
Iraqis speak out after years of fear. **Story, Page A12**

orders to shoot anything that moves west of the Euphrates River.

Four U.S. soldiers patrolling Baghdad were wounded Saturday when a young Iraqi girl handed them an explosive and it blew up. One soldier's leg was amputated, but no other injuries

Please see **Iraq, A12**

## The Great Vigil of Easter ushers in resurrection celebration



KEN LOVE/Akron Beacon Journal

Members of Trinity United Church of Christ on High Street in Wadsworth gathered Saturday night for The Great Vigil of Easter. Michael McCullough, 16, (above) holds the Paschal Candle, or Christ Candle, during the service.

# Easter's message of hope comforts

Grieving father hangs on to trust in God in dealing with son's death

By Colette M. Jenkins  
Beacon Journal religion writer

The Rev. Tandy Sloan made a decision years ago to trust God.

That trust hasn't changed. It hasn't wavered, despite the fact that he buried his only son, 19-year-old Brandon Sloan, a week ago.

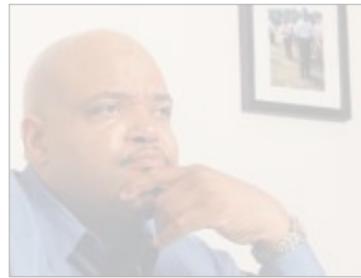
In the midst of agony, the Rev. Sloan is holding onto a hope centered on the resurrection of Christ. He believes that the joy of Easter Sunday will comfort him in his time of despair and reassure him that there is life after death.

"It's not easy," he says, "but you keep

believing and you keep trusting. It's more of a trust thing than anything else. God asks us to accept him on faith, and that is what I have done."

Sloan is the 44-year-old associate minister at the Historic Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Cleveland and a resident of Bedford Heights. He could easily be used as an example in the Easter messages being spoken in Christian churches today.

For the story of Easter is one of hope - Christians believe it reveals that Jesus Christ is alive and demonstrates God's power to overcome death.



KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

**The Rev. Tandy Sloan is holding onto a hope centered on the resurrection of Christ. He believes the joy of Easter Sunday will comfort him in his despair.**

Hope is the only thing that can sustain a person's day-to-day sanity when tragedy strikes, says the Rev. L.T. King, president of the United Missionary Baptist State Convention of Ohio and the pastor of Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church in Akron.

Please see **Easter, A13**



Associated Press

**Former U.S. prisoners of war wave to a cheering crowd Saturday night after their transport plane landed at Fort Bliss, Texas.**

# Ex-POWs return to patriotic cheers

Relatives and friends are among celebrants as plane arrives at Texas base with seven former Iraq captives

By Chris Roberts  
Associated Press

**FORT BLISS, TEXAS:** A military transport plane carrying seven former U.S. prisoners of war landed Saturday at Fort Bliss to cheers from flag-waving families and friends, a week after they were rescued.

Thousands of well-wishers hoisted American flags and burst into cheers as a C-17 landed on a wind-swept runway. Two servicemen emerged from a hatch on the plane, holding an American

flag and waving to the crowd as the plane taxied.

Five of the former POWs are stationed with the U.S. Army's 507th Maintenance Company. Two other Apache helicopter crewmen, who are with the First Cavalry Division, will continue to their home base at Fort Hood.

The seven were rescued April 13 after Iraqi captors abandoned their posts ahead of advancing American troops.

El Paso Mayor Raymond Ca-

Please see **POWs, A12**



Joseph Kidder

# New questions in ethics case

Interview just made public has details on Akron service director's home

By David Knox  
Beacon Journal staff writer

Antonio Polera told investigators nearly three years ago that he was hired by Frank Cioffi to pose as the builder of a home for former Akron Service Director Joseph Kidder.

When Polera, a Bath Township carpenter, complained about soaring construction costs - eventually reaching \$70,000 beyond estimates - he said Cioffi responded, "Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it."

Polera's statements were made in an Aug. 20, 2000, interview with members of a task force investigating Kidder for possible ethics violations involving construction of the home and a nearly \$1 million unbid construction contract awarded Cioffi about the same time.

The interview report - made public Friday after Summit County Common Pleas Judge Ted Schneiderman turned back a challenge from the city to keep the document secret - raises new

questions in a scandal that already has cost Kidder his job.

Kidder, 46, resigned from his \$109,096-a-year post last month - two weeks after the Beacon Journal published a story about the investigation based on 558 pages of Akron police documents.

The documents were made public after Schneiderman rejected a lawsuit filed by the city against the newspaper last May

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### More copies available

Looking for more copies of today's newspaper featuring the photographs of area women and men serving in the military? The Sunday edition will be available at the Akron Beacon Journal customer service desk and at Acme and Giant Eagle supermarkets throughout the week.

### Other headlines:

- Hong Kong reported a record 12 deaths in a single day from the SARS. **World, Page A4**
- Beacon Journal public editor discusses image of emaciated abuse victim. **Page A4**
- Measure makes new Ohio

college eligible for funds earmarked for elementary and secondary school building projects. **Local, Page B1**

The Indians lose 12-3 to White Sox. **Sports, Page C1**

Some people are making a living selling on eBay. **Business, Page D1**

### Today's weather

Showers and thunderstorms

70° High 53° Low  
NewsChannel 5 forecast, Page B12

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# Carpenter was asked to pose as contractor

Continued from Page A1

to keep the records secret. A Beacon Journal reporter requested copies of the documents after being told the 18-month investigation ended when Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh concluded in a letter to the Ohio Ethics Commission that "there is not enough evidence . . . to support a criminal charge."

## Insider's account

The Polera interview is significant because it provides an insider's account of who built Kidder's home and how much it cost to construct.

Polera told investigators the story began when he "was approached by Cioffi and asked to do a favor."

"Cioffi stated he was building a house" for Kidder "and he had to use Polera as the general contractor because it couldn't be known that Cioffi was building this house," Polera told investigators.

In return for fronting the job, Polera said Cioffi agreed to pay him \$20,000. Cioffi also gave Polera \$42,000 to buy a lot in Ellet for the Kidder home.

Cioffi, who could not be reached for comment Saturday, had reason to be concerned about building a house for Kidder. Ohio's conflict-of-interest law states that it is illegal for a public official to "accept anything of value" from those they deal with as part of their job. The first-degree misdemeanor is punishable by six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine for the official.

## Cioffi won 20 contracts

Cioffi had done considerable construction work for the city - he was awarded 20 contracts, worth more than \$6 million, between 1996 and June 2000, according to city records.

Six weeks before Polera bought the home lot - April 11, 1997 - Kidder had named Cioffi, who is primarily a concrete contractor, to renovate the former DIY building on Tallmadge Avenue. The city wanted the building for a new home for the Summit County Title Bureau.

The unusual purchase agreement called for DIY to hire Cioffi to do the renovation, with the city to pay the entire cost of remodeling - nearly \$1 million - in addition to the \$862,500 price of the building. The deal meant the city avoided the normal bidding process used to ensure the lowest and best price for the renovation work.

## Mayor takes blame

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic took the blame for skipping the bidding process, saying he had waited too long in hopes of finding another location for the Title Bureau. The delay left the city facing a deadline to move the office from the city-owned O'Neil's building - which was being renovated at the same time - or pay the county \$2 million to find new offices on its own.

"This had nothing to do with Joe other than he was stuck carrying out our orders to get the job done," the mayor said in an interview last month.

Kidder was aware of the possible conflict, saying that he searched for a homebuilder who didn't do business with the city and got Polera's name from a former councilman.

Polera had little experience as a homebuilder. He told investigators he had built only "three or four homes as a general contractor."

Kidder said he knew that

Cioffi would do some of the concrete work on the home, but cleared that with City Law Director Max Rothal, who said Cioffi was permitted to work as a subcontractor.

Polera told investigators Cioffi did much more than pour concrete and took pains to hide his involvement - going so far as to place magnetic signs, reading "Polera Construction" on the sides of Cioffi's trucks at the home site.

When Polera asked about the signs, Cioffi answered that "he couldn't be seen working there."

In addition to supplying the blueprints for the house, Cioffi prepared the cost estimates on Polera letterhead stationery, which were "then faxed to Polera," who submitted them to Kidder's bank as part of his mortgage application, Polera told investigators.

## House over estimates

Initially, Polera said "he was under the impression" the construction costs would be close to estimates.

But Polera said the 2,780-square-foot home, which features a basement recreation room, solid oak doors and trim, a wet bar and deck as well as sound, security and sprinkler systems, "went \$70,000 over budget."

Polera explained "that figure" represented the amount above the combined \$42,000 cost of the lot and a \$146,215 construction loan he had obtained.

That would make the cost of the home about \$258,215 - a figure close to the \$253,562 found in a spreadsheet included in earlier Akron police records.

Either total would mean the house cost substantially more than the \$203,600 county auditor records show Kidder paid.

So who made up the difference?

Polera told investigators he thought Cioffi paid some subcontractors out of his pocket. Polera wasn't sure how others were paid. But Polera said he got stuck with many of the bills and that Cioffi didn't pay the \$20,000 promised for agreeing to pose as the general contractor.

The money disputes led to a falling out.

In July of 1998, Cioffi sued Polera, claiming he had not repaid the \$42,000 loan for the lot.

## Wife tells of threat

Polera's wife, Antonia, told investigators she phoned Kidder about the suit, saying "if it went to court it would all come out."

She told the investigators "that everyone knew what was happening" - calling the construction of Kidder's house "a favor for the city jobs that Cioffi was getting."

Within days of the call, Cioffi dropped the suit, she told investigators.

The Poleras could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Kidder, who has repeatedly denied accepting anything from companies doing business with the city in exchange for favorable treatment, said he remembered the phone call from Antonia Polera, but doesn't recall specifics of the conversation.

"I was more concerned about the fact they were suing each other over my house," he said Saturday. "I called Frank and just said it was too bad - these were longtime friends suing each other over this."

Kidder stands by his earlier statement that he had "paid a fair price for his home."

Kidder said he has not seen the interview report, but said he

thoroughly reviewed the documents released earlier and concluded the records don't substantiate Polera's statements.

"There are no billings for some of those numbers," he said. "There is a lot of double billing and invoices that aren't there."

## Prosecutor disagrees

Polera's statements about cost overruns on the house also conflict with the judgment of the staff of county Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh.

During a Feb. 28 interview, after the release of the 558 pages of documents, assistant county Prosecutor Michael Carroll said that while investigators had found clear "evidence that Cioffi was involved in the construction of the house," they failed to show convincingly that Kidder got more house than he paid for.

"Our conclusion was that (Kidder) paid a fair price for that house," he said.

Carroll, one of three senior staffers who evaluated the investigation for Walsh, said he was aware the investigators had interviewed Polera, but didn't say more. The report had not been made public - presumably because it had been written by an Ohio Ethics Commission investigator.

Unlike police records, Ethics Commission documents aren't public record.

## Police report requested

But a version of the report was released late Friday, in response to a Beacon Journal motion asking the judge to recheck the files to determine if an Akron police officer also had written up the Polera interview. City attor-

neys opposed the motion.

County Prosecutor Walsh declined to discuss the Polera report. Through a spokesperson, Walsh said she could not com-

ment until she had a chance to consult records in her office on Monday.

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# Israelis invade Palestinian camp

5 killed, 35 wounded in latest army incursion

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP: Dozens of Israeli tanks backed by attack helicopters pushed into the Rafah refugee camp Saturday, one of the largest military incursions into the Gaza Strip in 30 months of fighting, Palestinians said.

At least five Palestinians were killed, including a 15-year-old boy, doctors said.

Witnesses said at least 35 people were wounded. Also Saturday, a cameraman for Associated Press Television News was shot and killed while filming clashes in which 17 Palestinians were wounded in the West Bank city of Nablus.

The incursion appeared to have targeted the Yibna neighborhood, one of two known militant strongholds in Rafah.

Israeli forces penetrated the camp from three directions using more than 35 tanks and armored personnel carriers, bulldozers and jeeps. Five attack helicopters circled overhead, flashing spotlights.

"I was sitting outside with

some friends playing cards when suddenly we came under fire," said Marwan Khatib, 39, who lives in the camp.

The army knocked out electricity in part of the camp, witnesses said. Rafah Mayor Said Zourab said undercover soldiers raided homes and troops were in control of most of the camp.

Palestinians said ambulances could not enter the camp, and all casualties had arrived at the hospital in private vehicles.

Rafah has been a flashpoint of tensions between Israeli troops and Palestinians. British peace activist Tom Hurndall, 21, was allegedly shot in the head by Israeli troops in Rafah on April 11. He remained in serious condition Saturday.

Hurndall was a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement, a Palestinian-backed group. The army has said it is investigating his shooting.

The operation in the refugee camp came hours after clashes in Nablus killed AP cameraman Nazeh Darwazeh, 45, and wounded 17 others.

Doctors said Darwazeh died of a bullet wound to the head.

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