



Craig Collier

Mission crowds out good news that we leave in January

BAGHDAD — Thanksgiving carried a special message for the soldiers of our squadron this year:

We're leaving in January. Unfortunately, we didn't have long to dwell on the good news.

During this Thanksgiving, the squadron command sergeant major and I visited each of our joint security stations, combat outposts and forward operating bases where we have soldiers. Earlier in the year, we purchased our squadron deployment coins, and we figured this was the best opportunity to hand them out.

We also passed on the message that we were redeploying about a month early.

My brigade deployed in November 2007 for 15 months, which meant leaving in February 2009. Now we're departing in January.

My soldiers greeted the news with relief but were not too surprised, as rumors that this would happen have been floating around for a while. We were so busy this month that there wasn't much time to dwell on the news before it was time for the next mission.

A few days later, on Dec. 1, al-Qaida in Iraq struck in my area of operations, detonating a combination suicide bomber and suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED). The suicide bomber wore a vest filled with ball bearings and explosives. He blew himself up at the entrance to an Iraqi police academy as Iraqi police were exiting.

Seconds later, the SVBIED blew up a few hundred yards away, apparently targeting first responders. My patrol happened to be heading that way, so we stopped to see what assistance, if any, we could provide. The site of the attacks was pretty gruesome.

Iraqi ambulances and security vehicles rushed to the scene, so all of the injured had already been evacuated. Iraqis have an amazing habit of springing into action in response to attacks and accidents. It's common for nearby strangers to immediately volunteer to drive casualties to the nearest hospital.

I'm not sure if this is due to cultural sensitivities about caring for the injured or practiced response, or a combination of both. We offered assistance to a few Iraqi leaders at the scene, but as expected, there was nothing more we could do to help.

Iraqi authorities reported nine killed and another 43 injured from the attack, most of them Iraqi police. Later that afternoon, one of the American news programs scrolled 19 killed and 53 injured. We're never sure where the media get their casualty data, but the tallies are almost always higher than what we get from the Iraqi Security Forces.

Still, there continue to be signs of progress here.

On Dec. 18, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki spoke at the grand opening of the reconstructed Mutanabi Book Market.

The book market is along the Tigris River in the old quarter of the city near an abandoned Turkish barracks. The market is well-known in Baghdad and attracts the city's intellectuals and students. Al-Qaida attacked it in

► Collier, A4

Local News

Small and struggling

Jewelry store, like others, seeks to ride out economic doldrums

By RoNeisha Mullen
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FLINT TWP. — Bryan Friedberg walked back and forth to the show-cases in his jewelry store, straightening out gold necklaces and bracelets, fidgeting with rings and moving them to just the right spots. Every now and then, he'd take a moment to admire the pieces, many of which he'd made himself.

Then he'd glance out the window and watch as shoppers headed into nearby stores, but not his.

It was a slow day. A slow month, in fact.

It was the peak of the holiday shopping season, just days before Christmas, and Friedberg's store, Bryan Jewelers, was empty.

"It's been a rough year," Fried-

About the store

- Bryan Jewelers is in the Somerset Plaza on Miller Road in Flint Township. The store sells gold and silver jewelry, including rings, bracelets, necklaces and watches. Certified loose diamonds and Moissanite stones are also available.
- Repair services are offered, and custom pieces can be designed.
- Visit www.bryanjewelers.com for more information.

berg said. "We had a lot of factors going against us this year."

A jeweler for more than 30 years, Friedberg is one of hundreds of local small-business owners battling the turbulent economy.

He has only two employees and



The Flint Journal • Melissa Cousineau

▲ Bryan Friedberg chats with employee Sarah Beckley during a slower day at Bryan Jewelers on Miller Road in Flint Township. There have been a number of slow days during December as the jewelry store, like other small businesses, competes for customers and deals with the struggling economy.

does much of the selling himself. He puts in far more than 40 hours a week, working late hours doing repairs and creating custom pieces. The repair work doesn't bring in

a wealth of money, but Friedberg says it's a service that customers want and appreciate.

► Struggle, A5



Flint Journal photos • John W. Adkisson

▲ The oldest signature in the Genesee County Roll of Attorneys book is that of Edward H. Thomson, a former senator and mayor of Flint who signed in October 1837.

Flourishes of legal history

Book dating to 1830s bears signatures of attorneys

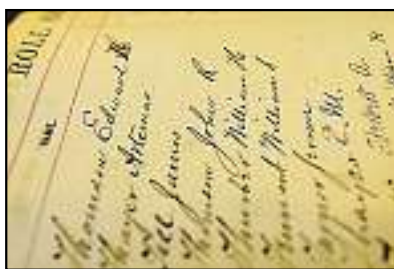
By Shannon Murphy
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GENESEE COUNTY — Plastic lining covers the slightly yellowed pages, preserving signatures that date back more than 150 years.

Tucked away on an office shelf at the Genesee County Courthouse sits a piece of local history.

What some officials call "the red book" is actually the Genesee County Roll of Attorneys — and contains the signatures of every attorney sworn to the bar in Genesee County since nearly the county's establishment in 1836.

While states keep a record of all attorneys on file, Genesee County is rare in requiring new lawyers to sign a historical book. No one is



▲ The book contains the signatures of every attorney sworn into the bar in Genesee County since nearly the county's establishment in 1836.

sure how the local book got started.

"It's our own tradition," said Circuit Judge Geoffrey Neithercut, who signed the book in 1975. "I love to see the signature script that those lawyers had in the 19th century. I look at my signature, and it looks 20th-century cheap."

The penmanship of those

in the 1800s and early 1900s looks more like calligraphy, a stark contrast to the more recent signatures in the back of the thick binder book.

And it reads like a who's who in the local political arena.

The oldest recorded signature is that of Edward H. Thomson, who signed in October 1837. Thomson, born in England, was a former state senator and mayor of Flint and founded the Michigan School for the

Deaf.

Also in the book is Sumner Howard, a Flint attorney and prosecutor who later was appointed U.S. district attorney for Utah. He signed the book in 1856 and gained recognition as a prosecutor in the Mountain Meadows Mas-

► Legal, A5

"I love to see the signature script that those lawyers had in the 19th century. I look at my signature, and it looks 20th-century cheap."

— Geoffrey Neithercut, Genesee County Circuit judge

Residents sound off on health care reform

By Sally York
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FLINT — A General Motors salaried retiree whose company-paid health insurance stops Jan. 1.

A Vietnam veteran who fought with Veterans Affairs for 15 years to get medical treatment for his agoraphobia.

A retired teacher whose adult children work but do not have health insurance.

Those were some of the people who came to a brainstorming session on health care reform Saturday morning in the basement of Mount Calvary Baptist Church. The event was held at the request of President-elect Barack Obama's transition team.

"He wants to know what people think will be a solution to the health care crisis that millions of people are facing in the United States," said Carol Mattoo of HealthCare-NOW! of Genesee County.

"If a solution ever can happen, now's the time. People are ready for it, and you've got a new president."

Tom Daschle, former U.S. senator and Obama's nominee for secretary of health and human services, tapped HealthCare-NOW! to host local discussions Dec. 15-31 on shaping health care legislation, Mattoo said.

No consensus was reached Saturday on how to fix health care in America, but most of the 15 people who came — despite rain, flooding and fog — agreed the system needs to be reformed to allow universal access to health services.

"Everybody needs to have access to high-quality health services," said Elizabeth Jordan of Flint Township. "It's a basic human right."

More than 45 million Americans are uninsured.

► Reform, A4

Community pulls together to help church overcome arson

Church of the Free Spirit

- A Sept. 11 fire caused extensive damage to the Church of the Free Spirit. The church has since been rebuilt.
- Arson officials are continuing to investigate, and anyone with information is asked to call (800) 44-ARSON.

By Shannon Murphy
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FLINT — Raymundo Vasquez was devastated three months ago as he watched fire ravage the church he helped build. But out of that destruction came hope. Last month, with the help

Newsmaker 2008

of church members and the community, Vasquez reopened the Church of the Free Spirit on Flint's east side.

"I got help from everybody," said Vasquez, the

church's pastor. "A bad thing was turned into good."

The Sept. 11 fire, which officials said was arson, caused extensive damage to the church at Belle Avenue and Lewis Street and destroyed a warehouse storing church supplies.

Sgt. Jim Hamilton, Flint police arson investigator,

said no arrests have been made and the investigation is continuing.

Inside the church, guitars, sound equipment and the pews were destroyed.

Vasquez, who moved from Oakland County to Flint after a calling to build

► Arson, A4