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livingwell



Photo by Jeff Whitten

Mike Viti, who is walking 7,100 kilometers to honor all the servicemen and women who have been killed in the Global War on Terror, talks to Capt. Matt Pryor and others during last week's reception at CrossFit High Tide in Richmond Hill.

TAKING IT A KILOMETER AT A TIME

Vet on cross-country trek to honor soldiers visits area

BY JEFF WHITTEN
For the Coastal Courier

By now, chances are most folks have heard of Mike Viti, the former Army full-back, West Point graduate and member of the United States Military Academy's class of 2008 who won a Bronze Star while serving as an artillery officer in Afghanistan.

If not, know this: story isn't so much about Viti as it is about those he served with and never served with — all 6,830 of the servicemen and women who have died the past 13 years in what is officially known as the Global War on Terror.

Viti's been walking cross-country since April — a kilometer for every one of those who never came back from places like Iraq and Afghanistan. By the time he finishes, Viti will have walked 7,100 kilometers in all. The trek began in Dupont, Washington, just outside Seattle, and will end Dec. 13 at the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia.

There's a reason for that day in that city at that game. But to get there, Viti first went south through California to San Diego, and then headed east, crossing the country one day at a time. Rain or shine, he walks 22 miles — or 36 kilometers — a day, six days a week. And he still has to walk north.

On Monday, 122 days into his walk, Viti came to Richmond Hill by way of Savannah. He was joined by the "Mike's Hiking for Heroes" team, including West Point football teammate and fellow war veteran and field-artillery officer Mark Faldowski.

West Point, it seems, is a small world.

Faldowski is brother of Julie Faldowski Pryor, whose husband is Capt. Matt Pryor, another West Pointer, war veteran and friend of Viti

and Faldowski. Together, the Pryors own CrossFit High Tide, a fitness center on Thunderbird Drive not far from the 144 exit off Interstate 95.

To Faldowski Pryor, getting involved in the project was a must.

"When my brother said he and Mike were going to be hiking around the country, Matt and I wanted to know how we could help," she said. So they did, to the point of raising money for the project.

It became a chance for the team to meet people interested in Viti's "Mike's Hiking for Heroes," which is the first project of Legacies Alive, the nonprofit group founded by Viti and Faldowski. The hike was Viti's idea, "but Mark (Faldowski) refined it," Viti said.

And if part of the plan is simply to remind people of the human cost of the Global War on Terror, the more important part of that plan is to provide support to families who don't need reminding just how much the war has cost.

Faldowski, who graduated from West Point in 2009, the year after Viti, and served two tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq, said Gold Star families — such as that of Capt. Matthew Freeman, the Marine who won the Bronze Star in the Aug. 7, 2009, battle in which he was killed — are why they walk.

His parents, Gary and Lisa Freeman, whose Matthew Freeman Project has raised thousands of dollars for various causes ranging from school supplies for the children of Afghanistan to handmade bears for children of Gold Star Families created from the uniforms of fallen service members, weren't able to make Monday's event due to an illness in the family. However, they met privately with the group



Photo provided by Lynn Knutson

Capt. Sara Knutson-Cullen was an Army aviator who was killed on March 11, 2013, in Afghanistan — less than six months after marrying fellow officer, Blackhawk pilot Capt. Chris Cullen. Knutson-Cullen's parents, Bill and Lynn Knutson, attended Monday night's reception at CrossFit High Tide for Mike Viti, who is walking 7,100 kilometers to honor all the servicemen and women who have been killed in the Global War on Terror.

Sunday, Faldowski said.

But there was a Gold Star Family in attendance Monday. Bill and Lynn Knutson drove from Bluffton, South Carolina, to attend the event at CrossFit. To them, Viti's hike is a reminder that their daughter, Capt. Sara Knutson-Cullen, won't be forgotten.

"It's nice to know somebody remembers her," Lynn Knutson said. "and all of the fallen soldiers."

Their daughter was an Army aviator who was killed on March 11, 2013, just two months after deploying to Afghanistan from Hunter Army Airfield and less than six months after marrying a fellow officer, Blackhawk pilot Capt. Chris Cullen, when the two of them were stationed together at Fort Wainwright in Alaska. Cullen got out of the military so his wife could stay in.

She was 27.

And like the other 6,830 names on the list that Viti keeps updated so he can write those names on flags

for the service in which an officer goes — in one or another.

"She was just that type of girl — very creative, very smart, a cheerleader, a member of the glee club, she had a beautiful voice," Bill Knutson said. "But as a woman, she wanted to contribute as much as the guys did. She wanted to be in harm's way, just like the guys did."

Aviation, Lynn Knutson said, offered her daughter that chance. But after six years, Knutson-Cullen was thinking about getting out of the Army once her deployment ended and had asked her parents to mail her books on the law. She'd majored in pre-law at West Point and was someone who'd take the opposing view on just about anything just to play devil's advocate.

"Just for argument's sake," Bill Knutson said. "She loved to argue. She's a special kid."

She also was a classmate of Faldowski's and Viti's, both of whom she knew.

"As soon as I saw (Viti's) face, I knew him because Sara used to talk about him," Lynn Knutson said. "She said even though he's a football player, he's just a regular guy who does duty with the rest of us."

For Viti, the biggest surprise of the journey has been the reaction of the 60 Gold Star Families he and his team have connected with so far.

"We didn't expect how inviting they've been and how much they've wanted to be involved," Viti said. "They've sought us out and taken us to dinners. They've taken us to their homes, to town-hall meetings, to city-council meetings and to memorials in their towns. They've really connected with us, and they've found the hike tells the story of their service and sacrifice appropriately, and they feel it's been a tool helping them recover and heal

by honoring the service of a loved one."

"I think that's their biggest fear, that their loved one's service gets forgotten and lost in 13 years of war," Viti said.

The Knutsons, who said they prefer visiting Warriors Walk on Fort Stewart — where a tree was planted in their daughter's honor — to her grave at Arlington National Cemetery, praised Fort Stewart for its handling of their daughter's death.

"The people at Fort Stewart have been absolutely wonderful to us throughout this whole ordeal," Bill Knutson said. "The support is there. The Army has been absolutely wonderful to us."

But that doesn't make it any easier for families like the Knutsons to come to terms with what happened, and why.

"My thoughts on this are our presidents are commanders in chief ... he's the boss," Lynn Knutson said. "Do I wish she hadn't gone? As a parent, I wish she hadn't ... and she had the option to stay as a rear-detachment person, but if I'd told her to stay, she's have said, 'No, it's my job to go.' As I parent, I wish she hadn't gone, but that's what she wanted to do. And she'd have gone."

Bill Knutson said he'd prefer to think the sacrifice of so many wasn't in vain.

"Politics aside, we've lost a lot of good people, a lot of very talented, good people, and that hurts. I hope it's for something," he said. "I hope that something good comes out of it and 10 years from now, it's not the same as it was 10 years ago, but I personally think it's going to be the same. But there are a lot of families in the same boat we are."

Viti and his team may not meet them all, but it seems it won't be for lack of effort. He

KILOMETER continues on 16B

Paying it forward — with food and love

By JENNIFER CABE
Special to the Courier

These days, many businesses say they're community-focused, and plenty are true to that claim. Being engaged with our neighbors is actually good business, because if a community isn't thriving and healthy, its businesses will struggle.

Organizations across Savannah are supporting the Canyon Ranch Institute Savannah Partnership, which is helping people make healthy choices every day through the energetic CRI Life Enhancement Program with Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care and the CRI Healthy Garden program at Trustees' Garden, as well as the CRI Theater for Health and CRI Healthy Table programs that will launch in 2015.

One CRISP collaborator — the 1-year-old Dept. 7 East — is getting a lot of media attention, winning awards and receiving outstanding reviews across social media for its delicious food and quirky sandwich names (Bonnie Blue, anyone?).

Dept. 7 East also has earned accolades and return business for its highly professional catering and in-house events, dedication to locally sourced ingredients and even its charming décor.

But there is a little secret about Dept. 7 East that isn't being blasted from Savannah's rooftops. Dept. 7 East co-owners Meta Adler and chef Michele Jemison are investing in the Savannah community by contributing time, money, food and Savannah-style hospitality and love back to the people and place they call home.

I had no luck getting these



Photo by James Byous

Dept. 7 East co-owners chef Michele Jemison and Meta Adler donate their time, talent and food to the first reunion of the Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program with Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care. The reunion, which was held at the Charles H. Morris Center, brought together graduates of the free program to help them sustain their commitment to healthy living through physical activity, stress management, healthy eating and having fun. Adler and Jemison's demonstration cooking session added to what the graduates learned in the program about shopping and healthy cooking on a budget. Adler and Jemison showed graduates how to prepare a seafood dinner for less than \$4 per person.

ladies to brag about themselves. Adler and Jemison are great business partners and friends who finish each other's sentences and seem to have an unspoken pact about not tooting their own horns. So we're bragging for them.

Their philosophy is laid out on their website like this: "We feel passionately for supporting local purveyors, farmers and businesses, while always contributing positively back to our Savannah community."



In conversation, Adler and Jemison are much more apt to sing the praises of their suppliers, such as Davis Produce, Polk Produce and Dubberly's Seafood. Check out the photo to learn more about Dept. 7 East and their commitment to CRISP and Savannah. And then visit them at 7 East Broughton in beautiful historic Savannah,

online at www.dept7east.com or call them at 912-232-0215.

If you want more info about CRISP, call Canyon Ranch Institute at 912-443-3264 or email CRI@canyon-ranchinstitute.org.

Cabe is the executive director and a board member of Canyon Ranch Institute.

Help with heating bills is available

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER
editor@coastalcourier.com

The Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority will assist eligible households with heating bills.

Georgia's Heating Assistance program will start Monday for homebound and elderly households 65 years or older, with the public starting Dec. 1. Payments will be made directly to the home-energy supplier.

To participate in the program, the family must have an income equal to or less than 175 percent of the poverty guidelines as follows: for a one-person household, \$21,180; for two persons, \$27,697; for three persons, \$34,214; for four persons, \$40,731; for five persons, \$47,248; for six persons, \$53,765; for seven persons, \$54,987; for eight

persons, \$56,209 and for each additional person add \$1,222 annual income.

Applicants must bring their most-current fuel bill or statement of service from their heat provider. They must also have proof of income for all household members for the last 30 days. This may be a check stub or an award letter granting public assistance, Social Security, VA or unemployment compensation.

Applicants must also bring social security numbers and proof of age for all household members.

Anyone wishing to apply for benefits in Liberty County should call 1-866-423-8081 for an appointment. Households will be served on a first-come, first-served basis. The program will close when funds are exhausted.



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Art show to feature paintings inspired by social injustice, hope

Opening reception Thursday at Hospice Savannah Art Gallery

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER
editor@coastalcourier.com

A show described as “a colorful passport to the world” will be on display until January at the Hospice Savannah Art Gallery.

Painter Miriam Urizar Rittmeyer and photographer Devon Murphy will be on hand at their opening artists’ reception from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday at the gallery at 1352 Eisenhower Drive.

On the night of the opening reception, Rittmeyer will display pieces from her hand-crafted “Raindrops” jewelry collection: lariats of sandalwood beads, pearls and Tibetan metal. The reception also will feature traditional music as well as her specialty foods from Guatemala, Mexico, India and the Middle East.

A native of Guatemala, Rittmeyer most recently served as the executive director of the Savannah Community Health Mission. This is her first show of paintings; they spring from her passion to address issues of social in-



justice and health-care inequities while simultaneously capturing the beauty, hope and happiness of the world’s indigenous peoples.

Her large-scale, loosely painted bold pieces are complemented by the sharply focused photographs from various cultures taken by her world-traveling friend.

Murphy, a native of the United States, has found happy homes in 23 countries during his travels. After graduating from Virginia Tech with a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, he spent two years in rural Uganda teaching physics and mathematics for the U.S. Peace Corps.

The show will hang through early January. For more information, go to www.HospiceSavannah.org/Rittmeyer.



Photo provided

Guatemala native Dr. Miriam Rittmeyer — creator of this piece, “Generations” — will be at an opening artists’ reception from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday at Hospice Savannah. Photographer Devon Murphy will join her.

REGIONAL HEALTH NEWS

Bryan Emergency Services raises \$1,000 to help fight breast cancer

Funds go to local Komen affiliate

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER
editor@coastalcourier.com

For the second year in a row, with the help from the community and partners,

Bryan County Emergency Services raised awareness for breast cancer as well as \$1,000 for a donation to Susan G. Komen of Coastal Georgia foundation.

Firefighters, medics and other employees of Bryan County and local businesses around the community, such as Urgent Care, Pals in Richmond Hill and the First Bank

of Coastal Georgia in Pembroke, wore pink T-shirts. The shirts were sold and worn to support breast-cancer awareness.

“We hope we’ve accomplished our goal of bringing awareness to the cause and urge women to get checked,” Fire Chief Freddy Howell said. “Through our donation, we hope to help sup-

port a cure for this disease. This year, we had so much community support and we appreciate all the local businesses partnering with us on this.”



Photo provided

Bryan County Emergency Services workers display the \$1,000 check they presented to the Susan G. Komen of Coastal Georgia foundation for breast-cancer awareness.



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Arthritis can make every-day activities, such as raking and housework, difficult or impossible. A new program aims to help people with arthritis manage their pain with exercise.

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Exercise may help to reduce arthritis pain

Eight-week program aims to help participants ease symptoms

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER
editor@coastalcourier.com

BRUNSWICK — Physical movement is an effective way to relieve arthritis pain, according to the Arthritis Foundation. Yet arthritis often is one of the reasons people avoid physical activity.

The Arthritis Exercise Program at Southeast Georgia Health System helps arthritis sufferers enjoy a more active lifestyle.

Classes are held twice a week year-round in eight-week intervals at the Brunswick Campus Outpatient Rehabilitation Care Center, 2600 Wildwood Drive. The most recent series began Nov. 3, and classes will continue to meet from 2-3 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays. The cost for the eight-week program is \$45.

The program, led by

Arthritis Foundation-certified instructors, is designed to help people with arthritis gain flexibility, strengthen their muscles, reduce pain and stiffness, increase energy levels and improve mood. Anyone who routinely experiences joint pain, stiffness or limited range of motion is encouraged to attend.

The course incorporates the optional use of resistance bands and weights for an added workout as well as interactive health-education lessons and stress-reducing relaxation techniques to help participants better manage their arthritis. The low-impact exercises can be done while sitting, standing or lying on the floor.

Participants must register by calling 912-466-5160 prior to the start of each eight-week series.

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KILOMETER

Continued from page 13B

began the walk, he said, because when he got out of the Army, he still wanted to give something back. And, Viti needed a mission.

"The thing that was missing was camaraderie," Viti said. "That sense of brothers and sisters in service."

So, the idea of the hike was born, evolved and began.

"One of the promises I made to myself was, I wasn't going to leave military service in the rear-view mirror," Viti said. "I'm a big proponent of philanthropy, and I always wanted to give something back. To me, the group that needs the most attention are the Gold Star Families of the 6,830 people we've lost. I wanted to connect that with the public and let them know these are families in your community and some of them probably need your

help."

He and Faldowski will end this project at the Army-Navy game because they played football for Army, and that means something. The final two kilometers will, like the others, be dedicated to the memories of servicemembers killed in the Global War on Terror.

The next-to-last name on Viti's handwritten list is that of former Navy quarterback J.P. Blecksmith, a Marine officer killed Nov. 11, 2004, in battle in Iraq. The last name is that of Army 1st Lt. Chase Prasnicky, a teammate of Faldowski and Viti's at West Point who was killed June 27, 2012, in Afghanistan — three days into his deployment — after he volunteered to lead a patrol and his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device.

"We'll walk that last kilometer in his honor," Viti said.

If the Knutsons are any indication, it will mean the world to Prasnicky's family.



CrossFit High Tide members pose with former Army Capt. Mike Viti, a West Point graduate and Army football player who is walking across the country in honor of those killed in the war on terror since 2001. Viti's trek took him through Bryan County on Nov. 3.

Jeff Whitten

They find comfort in what Viti and his team of hikers are doing and did for them.

"Every time someone re-

members, it makes you feel there are people out there besides us who will remember Sara. Of course, her family's

always going to remember," Lynn Knutson said. "But it's nice to know her legacy will live on through somebody

else." For more information about the project, go to www.mikeshikingforheroes.com.

LIVING WITH CHILDREN

Overly involved parents hamper kids' ability to grow on their own

Why are young adult children emancipating so much later than they did in 1970, when the average age of male emancipation — independent living, paying one's own bills — was 21?



JOHN ROSEMOND
Parenting columnist

Why do significant numbers of college professors and even employers complain about parents of young adult students/employees confronting them over, respectively, bad grades and workplace issues?

Why have reduced class sizes and increased per-pupil expenditures not resulted in higher academic achievement levels?

Why is the mental health of today's kids so poor when compared with that of children in the 1960s and before?

Why has school phobia, test anxiety and separation anxiety become so problematic in early elementary-age populations, when those problems were extremely rare 50-plus years ago?

Why do today's parents become defensive when told by teachers that their children have misbehaved in school?

The answer is in two words: parent involvement. Those two words summarize the difference between old child rearing and nouveau, post-1960s parenting.

Prior to the psychological parenting revolution of the late 1960s and early '70s, parents were not highly involved with their kids.

They supervised well and were available in case of crisis, but they stood a safe distance from their kids and allowed them to experience the inestimable benefits of the trial-and-error process. They gave their children long ropes and made them lie in the beds they made and stew in their own juices.

It was the child's job, back then, to keep his or her parents from getting involved. That was how children learned to be responsible and sturdy.

Today's parents, by contrast, give short ropes, lie in their children's beds — literally — and stew in their children's juices.

They organize their children's games, social lives and after-school activities. They help their kids with homework, help them study for tests, mediate their conflicts with peers, and, well, get involved.

This is a sure-fire recipe for kids who are not sturdy.

These are parents who

are confused when it comes to an understanding of their purpose in their kids' lives. Their involvement leads them to personalize everything that happens to their kids; thus, the defensiveness.

But given that schools and mental-health professionals have been pushing parent involvement for nearly four decades, the confusion and defensiveness are understandable.

Researchers at Duke and the University of Texas analyzed three decades of data pertaining to parent partici-

pation in children's academics. Their conclusions confirmed what I've been saying since the 1980s: Parental help with homework lowers a child's academic achievement and is not reflected on standardized tests.

I propose that the same relationship between parent participation and child success is true no matter the context.

Parents who manage a child's social life interfere with the development of good social skills. Parents who manage a child's af-

ter-school activities grow kids who don't know how to fill their own free time. Parents who get involved in their kids' conflicts with peers grow kids who don't know how to avoid, much less solve, conflict.

These kids have anxieties and fears of all sorts and don't want to leave home. And their parents, when the time comes, don't know how to stop being parents.

Rosemond, a family psychologist, answers questions on his websites, johnrosemond.com and parentguru.com.



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