

Methuen Santa Parade



Timony Students Spend Day at The State House



Students from the Timony School in Methuen spent a day at The State House last month, getting a tour from state Representative Barbara L'Italien (second from right), Methuen state Senator Steve Baddour (far left) and newly elected state Representative Linda Dean Campbell (far right).

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Attacks on Police Chief Joe Solomon Must Stop!

Debbie Quinn, Methuen City Councilor



city councilor and citizen.

Our police officers serve and protect us all year long. They miss out on family events, birthdays, anniversaries, outings, holidays and so much more to do a job that can be quite dangerous.

As rumors and innuendo swirl around the political swamp, I think it is vitally important to support our Police Department and I urge everyone to stop trading in rumors and start concentrating on producing the best possible public-safety environment for Methuen.

Regardless of the community, being a chief of police can be a truly difficult job. A chief has to juggle the competing political demands made by mayors, unions, city councilors, and most importantly, the public.

In some instances, these competing demands produce terrific political backlashes that have been directed against chiefs everywhere. In Methuen, the rumor mill has been working overtime to discredit Police Chief Joseph Solomon. These politically motivated attacks are designed to prevent him from doing his job as chief, and it really needs to stop.

I cannot say that I agree with the chief on everything, but I feel he has a strong record of accomplishment for Methuen. What are those accomplishments? Under the

leadership of Chief Joseph E. Solomon we have monthly neighborhood crime-watch meetings and annual business crime-watch meetings. These meetings aim at the twin goals of crime reduction and prevention. Preventing crime is far better than reacting to crime that has already occurred.

Chief Solomon's proactive approach to crime is reflected in the following specific examples of achievement made by the Methuen Police Department under his leadership:

* Chief Joe Solomon has implemented programs and procedures to improve the ability of the Police Department to respond to major emergencies by creating the Homeland Security and Drug Intervention Unit.

* Under Chief Joe Solomon, Methuen police officers have been trained by the U.S. Coast Guard to coordinate actions to prevent and respond to **river-targeted emergency** situations and possible terrorist incidents.

* Chief Solomon established a **Traffic Unit** to help reduce traffic accidents and injuries.

* Chief Solomon has established and expanded a **Motorcycle Unit**, with trained officers to assist with traffic control, escorts and patrol.

* The chief is an active participant in the growing **neighborhood watch groups**.

* He has established a very effective **crime prevention program**.

* He has expanded a highly professionally trained **Criminal Investigation Division**.

* Chief Solomon applied for and secured a **1.5 million dollar WEED and SEED** grant to help to teach our children and elder citizens how to use computers.

* The chief has established a **safe haven** where kids in Methuen can be shielded away from drugs, gangs and crime while learning the best ways to succeed in school.

* The chief has encouraged and will continue to support the **churches' drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs**.

* He has maintained and increased excellent cooperation with all law enforcement agencies and volunteer organizations, the emergency medical services and its personnel, Fire Departments, and other groups concerned about citizens' welfare.

* He has established one of the first programs placing **school resource officers** in every public school in the city. This has allowed these officers to interact with and be a resource for principals, teachers, administrators, and students, and present a positive image of the police. These resource officers establish and maintain various youth programs such as drug and alcohol education, child safety, and bicycle safety; they address students, assemblies, and special interest clubs on subjects directly related to these programs. Officers work with school officials and parent groups to safeguard the safety of students and staff on and around school grounds.

The chief established a **Special Police Operations Unit** that has trained to respond to emergencies at each of our schools.

* Chief Solomon has led the charge to be the first in the commonwealth to put into place and test an **emergency lock down**

procedure of our schools to ensure the safety of our children.

* Chief Solomon established a **summer park** program for our children.

* He maintains a **child safety car seat program** with trained officers that assist our citizens in the protection of children in motor vehicles.

The chief helped establish and expand the **Neighborhood Services Bureau** that handles quality of life issues within our individual neighborhoods to better serve our residents.

* He established and maintains the **community policing philosophy** throughout the Police Department.

* Chief Solomon put in place a **message board** that is deployed around the community and is used to get the word out during **Amber alerts**.

* He has expanded **traffic education** to our youth in cooperation with driver education schools.

* The chief obtained the city's first **search and rescue K-9**, which has been used in numerous occasions to search for and locate missing children and elderly.

* He established and professionally trained Methuen's first **Internet Investigations and Forensics Unit**. This unit works on computer crime, forensic investigation and child Internet safety.

The fundamental truth is that the Methuen Police Department has made great strides under Chief Solomon's leadership.

I have been disappointed by the political attacks centered on the chief and the department, and I hope that the warm political atmosphere that has occurred during the past year has not been shattered by these obsessive attacks on the chief. Political gossip is one thing, but as public officials we must stay focused on the job at hand.

As one of nine city councilors, I pledge to work positively with my colleagues, the chief, and the mayor to make the Methuen Police Department the very best it can be. And I will continue to be pro-blue!

Debbie Quinn is a West End District City Councilor in Methuen. She is in her first term and can be reached at drq270@yahoo.com

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Home Health VNA From Page 20

whose families are struggling to make ends meet during the holidays, let alone putting gifts under the tree.

"These gifts are going to make for a very bright Christmas for families who may have otherwise had a bleak holiday. The generosity of Merrimack College's alumni, friends and parents is truly amazing."

There was a little bit of everything under the tree at Merrimack College's Sakowich Campus Center. Bright colored toys, huggable plush friends and even a pair of handmade dolls will be making their way into the homes of children throughout the Merrimack Valley this Christmas morning.

"We have so many children in our program who are struggling with illness and trying to keep a positive outlook," said Emily Raymond, a nurse with Home Health VNA's Maternal & Child Health program. "As a nurse, it is so rewarding to be able to bring this happiness into the home of a

family that has been coping with the strain of a chronically ill child. These families are truly grateful for this expression of kindness."

Home Health VNA is a not-for-profit agency dedicated to serving the home care needs of patients of all ages. Most recently, Out-come Concept Systems (OCS) named Home Health VNA among the top 5% of home health care agencies in the United States. Home Health VNA is certified by the Joint Commission of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and is affiliated with Merrimack Valley Hospice and HomeCare, Inc.

Together, the three agencies serve more than 80 communities throughout the Merrimack Valley and southern New Hampshire from their offices in Lawrence, Chelmsford, Peabody, Haverhill and Newburyport. Visit them on the web at www.homehealthvna.org.

Wilfredo Laboy From Page 15

big boost right away—our scores were so low we could only go up, but it was encouraging.

I inherited a group of skilled teachers who were disheartened and disenchanted. There were a lot of good people doing good work, but they were very discouraged. I needed to pick them up, dust the dirt off their shoulders, and inspire them to embrace a new beginning. I didn't bring in my own staff or consultants. There's a tendency among superintendents to undo everything that's been done in a district. I think you're more effective moving carefully and deliberately, and addressing the systems that are disjointed or broken. It's imperative to strike a balance. You have to have a sense of urgency—there is no time to waste when you're educating a child—but you have to move cautiously. Don't be a bull in a china shop.

BTB: You've accomplished a lot during your tenure as superintendent. You've realigned resources to support standards-based work in all schools, restructured the ELL program, and dramatically boosted MCAS scores, to name a few. What are you most proud of?

WL: When I assumed my position, the average tenure of an urban superintendent nationally was two years, and the district had hired and fired six superintendents in five years. I am most proud that I am still here, seven years later, and that our district is continually making great gains. Reading and math MCAS scores have improved in all grades. Lawrence High School regained its NEASC accreditation in 2004. We're now in the process of converting our high school into six small thematic schools on twenty-five acres. It's being transformed into a state-of-the-art high school campus for \$110 million. We're investing in Lawrence's promising students, and preparing them for college.

I am truly passionate about my work. Some thought I would burn out at this pace, and they were worried about

me keeping my job. I told them if I wanted to keep a job, I would have stayed in New York City. I came here to do a job. I am proud that I've been able to reorganize the school system, build consensus, and develop intestinal fortitude within the district to get this important job done.

BTB: What qualities does an effective superintendent possess?

WL: Being a superintendent is not a job for the lighthearted. It's not a Monday through Friday job; it's a 24/7 job.

As a public servant, you're subject to public praise and criticism; you're constantly being evaluated. You have to have a strong sense of self. Your life is measured by the example that you give. You have to have a calling for this work.

BTB: I hear you're an avid reader. Do you have any book recommendations that will inspire your fellow leaders and educators?

WL: I am a voracious reader, and have been inspired by many books. The teacher can also be the student. I recommend Michael Fullan's *Turnaround Leadership* and *Leading in a Culture of Change*; *Moral Leadership* by Thomas J. Sergiovanni; *The Learning Leader* by Douglas B. Reeves; *The Principal as Staff Developer* by Richard P. DuFour; and *Shaping School Cultures* by Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson.

I also enjoy Leo F. Buscaglia's work, including: *Personhood: The Art of Being Fully Human*; *Bus 9 to Paradise*; *Papa, My Father*; *Living, Loving, and Learning*; and *Way of the Bull*. In the continuation of this interview, Dr. Laboy will share his *Seven Essential Principles of School Transformation* and comment on his leadership role with ALAS. www.beyond-the-book.com

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Too Much Graffiti

Methuen City Councilor Ken Willette

This column is dedicated to both state and local issues, which should immediately be addressed by our respective leaders at the State House and Methuen City Hall.



is the current presence of graffiti on state bridges, which rapid response teams can purge in a heartbeat.

Finally, at the local level, neighbors on Forest Street have expressed legitimate concerns about a proposed housing development in their vicinity.

I have witnessed a disturbing proliferation of graffiti on state bridges throughout the Merrimack Valley. I am not entirely sure if the unsightly graffiti is the direct result of "tagging" by local gangs, but a rapid response by the MassHighway department is definitely in order. I will submit my concerns directly to Senator Steve Baddour regarding the urgency to eradicate extensive graffiti on state bridges and structures.

The rumor mill has run rampant, with discussion of the possible creation of a Chapter 40R district on that parcel of land. I have stated my official opposition to such a district because of the following reasons. First of all, a Chapter 40R is normally slated for a downtown area, near a transit rail and/or on an underdeveloped industrial parcel of land.

My main recommendation will be to establish a 1-800 Hot-Line to enable motorists to report existing graffiti and suspicious activity. A process is already in place for motorists to report debris fields of garbage near our state roadways, so a similar process identified on highway signs and through the Internet can and should be utilized to prioritize trouble spots for graffiti tagging.

None of the aforementioned criteria would be abided by if such a district is authorized on Forest Street. Secondly, I do not believe that the forthcoming master plan would promote suburban sprawl and the over-saturation of approximately 35-40 homes on a mere six acres of land. The residents have already complained about the poor water pressure in the area, which would merely be compounded with the unwarranted and intolerable approval of so many homes side by side.

The official state web site can also be geared for this important mission. By expeditiously removing graffiti on state bridges and other structures, we will be implementing the "broken windows" theory of policing, which directly calls for the removal of graffiti on public facilities to deter further acts of criminal activity. New York City and Washington, D.C. have been highly successful in devoting constant manpower and resources aimed at removing graffiti on subway cars and throughout subway stations.

I have suggested to Methuen City Council Chairman Zanni that we conduct a public meeting on this matter to ensure that all neighbors and councilors alike will be allowed to express their opinions on the record to the developer, as opposed to outside meetings which, by law, could not include a majority of the council (the three at-large councilors plus the West End councilors). A public meeting will clear the air, compel the developer to render a formal presentation and allow the neighbors to mobilize their opposition. To be continued!

Commuters appreciated the cleanup efforts and directly witnessed a reduction of such blatant gang activity and criminality as a result. The appearance of lawlessness, whether it is graffiti or broken windows, must be addressed head on as it will pay positive dividends to the commonwealth. The first visual impression that motorists witness while traveling through our commonwealth

Ken Willette is an at-large city councilor in Methuen. You can email him at kennethwillette@comcast.net

Melinda Woekel O'Hearn

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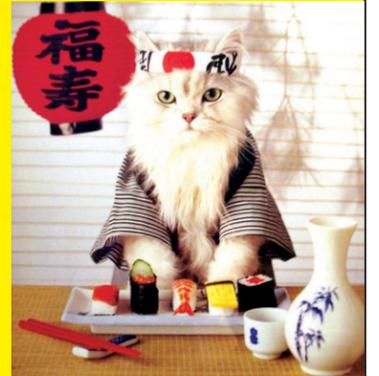
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Methuen News

Kathleen Corey Rahme
Methuen City Council, At-Large, Methuen
Youth Corps Founder

The Methuen Ranger Band



Methuen has had a high school band for as long as anyone can remember. One of the often overlooked components of a successful high school band is the volunteers, particularly the parents. Without them, I am hard pressed to imagine that the band would exist as we know it today. Of course there would be a Methuen High School Ranger Band, but it would probably not be logistically capable of doing everything it does. I would like to acknowledge the good works of the Methuen Ranger Band Parents Association and share with you how their various gifts of time, talent and treasure make our band so successful.

The Methuen Ranger Band Parents Association (MRBPA), formerly known as Methuen Parents for Better Music, incorporated itself in 2003 as a 501-C3 organization to be able to obtain grants and other benefits that would otherwise not be available. They exist for the sole purpose of benefiting the band.

This is an all volunteer group, made up of parents, relatives and friends. There is an elected executive board as well as class representatives for every grade. There is also a large, parent, volunteer base. They are the ones who are responsible for the transport of student musicians, color guard, and equipment. Annually they travel over 2000 miles throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire. They also drive the busload of equipment to Florida every other year, when the band is invited to parade through Main Street USA, Disney World as ambassadors of our city.

Enthusiasm for the band is reflected by their numbers. Traditionally the band has had a compliment of around 130 members. It provides entertainment and enjoyment for three annual parades in Methuen alone; Veterans Day, Santa Parade, and Memorial Day. They also parade in Haverhill and Salem, NH. When you see the band marching down the street, be sure the Methuen Band Parents are marching along side them to provide escort.

They are the ones wearing blue jackets and Khaki slacks carrying the water or picking up the musician who fainted.

The band plays at all the football games at home and away. When they are at

Nicholson Stadium playing the half time show, parent volunteers assist the band, especially the pit section in dragging out all the equipment, first from the school to the bus, from the bus to the field and then back again. There is never any commotion and unless you knew better, you probably would never know this was even happening. Ticket sales for 50-50 raffle are sold by parent volunteers. Let me say this. When you have a child join the band, YOU join the band.

In an effort to help defray the cost incurred by the students when they go to Florida, several fundraisers are held to benefit the band members all of which are coordinated by the MRBPA. They sell candy bars and poinsettias. Throughout the year, other events are offered to the community to benefit both the band and graduating senior scholarships, such as Beatlejuice (I recommend it highly!), the Holiday Concert scheduled for December 20 at 7:00 at MHS, and one of my personal favorites is the Spring Concert featuring the Jazz Band and Dirty Hands, Inc. (a group resembling Stomp or Blue Man Group). The MBPA coordinates all the logistics and construct an ad booklet to benefit the band. They obtain sponsorship of the annual dinner before the concert from local restaurants.

Annually, the MICCA (Massachusetts Instrumental Choral Conductors Association) is held in Methuen. There are upwards of ten school bands that come to Methuen to perform in this prestigious competition. The logistics of this event are awesome. Parking busses, unloading equipment and students, food, first aid, performance scheduling and assembling, ticket sales, tee-shirts, programs, crowd control and so much more must be handled by the MRBPA. I am certain that I didn't even mention the half of it.

The band is such an integral part of our community. We have grown to expect them at our inaugurations, tree lighting, and other special events. They are such an asset to any occasion. The MRBPA is the group that makes this happen. It is like the electricity you enjoy in your home. For me, I don't care where it comes from. I just turn the switch on and I have grown to expect it to be there. From now on, when you see the

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award winning Methuen Ranger Band perform, know and appreciate the many volunteers that make it happen.

The Neighbors in Need were assisted this past Thanksgiving when the MRBPA delivered 140 meals to needy families. This was done using the old, blue band bus.

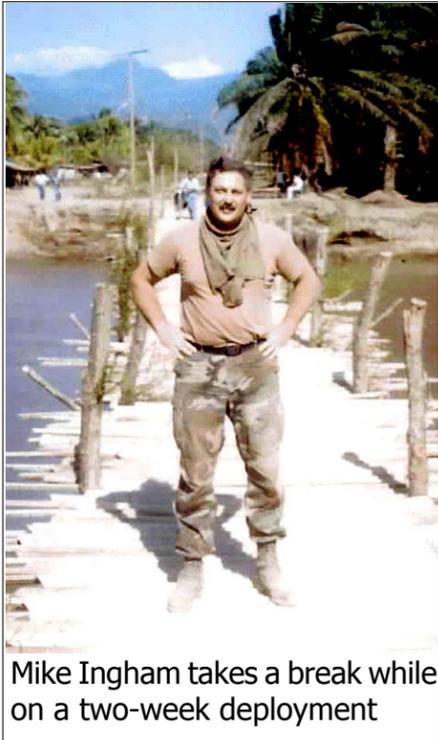
There is an effort by the MRBPA to get a new band bus. Many of the volunteers currently serving may not even have children in the band when they finally get one. This is just an example of how giving these folks are. They are forward thinking in their love of the band. Does anyone have an extra bus? Does anyone have any ideas on how to get one?

The MBPA will receive a well deserved City Council proclamation on Monday, December 18, at 7:00 PM in the Great Hall, Methuen City Hall.

I would like to invite all the band members, current and former to come and acknowledge this special group. To them, I say thank you on behalf of a grateful city.

Kathleen Corey Rahme is the former Central District Councilor in Methuen and was elected as a city councilor "at large" last year. She is also the founder of the Methuen Youth Corps and hosts "Call to Serve." You can email her at kcoryerahme@comcast.net

Mike Ingham: Valley Patriot of the Month, From Page 1



Mike Ingham takes a break while on a two-week deployment

Mike went off to school and studied fine art, photography and sculpture, among other pursuits. But after two years, Mike was looking for something else. So in December of 1973, Mike Ingham went down to see the Air Force recruiter in Haverhill and enlisted.

Mike was sent to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas for what was supposed to be eight weeks of basic training. He had been told that this was the best time of the year to go because there were two weeks during Christmas and New Year's that didn't count. However, he remembers that when he got there he found out that he still had to train during those two weeks that "didn't count" - so he ended up with a total of 10 weeks of basic training.

On New Year's Day, 1974, during training, Mike met Shirley Lawrence from the small town of Alger, Ohio. After a short courtship, the two were married on February 23, 1974.

After basic, Mike was sent to Sheppard Air Force Base, also in Texas, for further training. Shirley was initially assigned to Chanute Air Force Base, Ill. for schooling as a jet mechanic, but was later reassigned to Sheppard Air Base where the two were reunited. After a short courtship, the two were married on February 23, 1974.

Mike had decided he wanted to be a loadmaster, one who loads equipment and supplies onto airplanes. But that particular school was not open at the time, so he ended up at the "heavy equipment" school. Here, Mike learned to operate front-end loaders, bulldozers, cranes, graders, forklifts and large tractor-trailers. He chuckles when he recalls his mother's warning about ending up "driving a truck."

Mike was asked to stay on as an instructor, but he and Shirley decided to accept an assignment to Bitburg Air Base in Germany as part of the 36th Tactical Fighter Wing. Mike was now a heavy equipment operator and spent his time maintaining/constructing roads and buildings at the base. One of his critical jobs was training for the emergency repair of runways.

This was during a period of the Cold War when the threat from an invasion of Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces was always present and the U.S. had to be prepared. If the Soviets ever attacked, the route would be through Germany. Bitburg was a major defensive position and once its fighters

took off to oppose the invading force, they would need undamaged runways to land on, refuel and continue combat operations.

Meanwhile, Shirley had been trained to service F4 Phantom jets and in Bitburg became the first female crew chief to maintain F4 fighter planes.

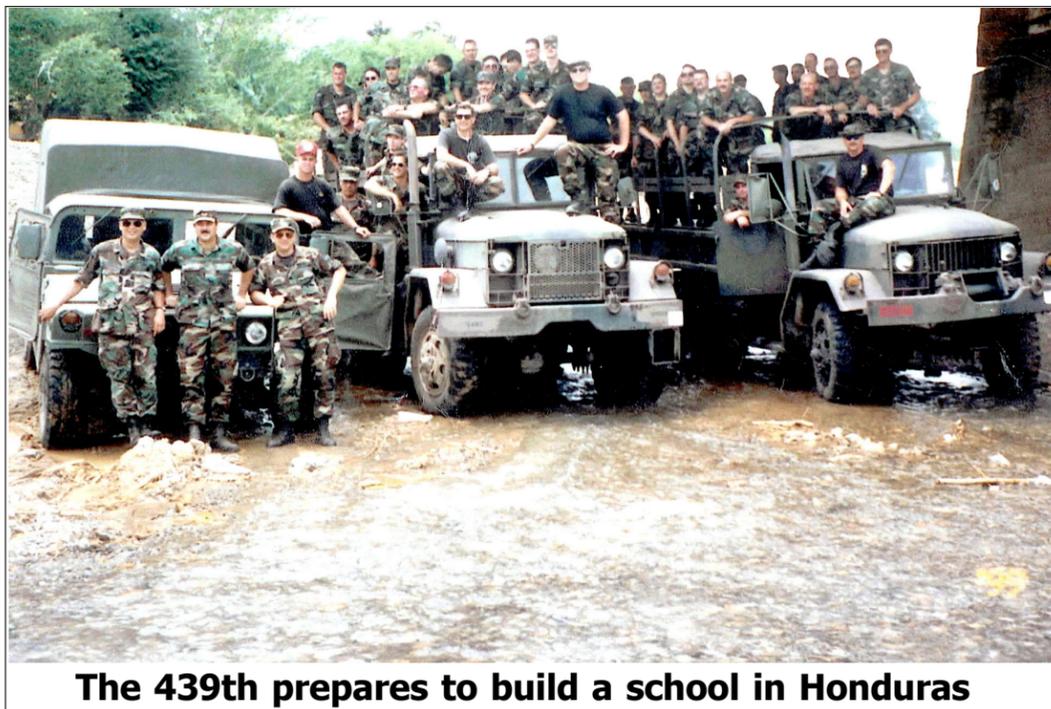
After two years in Germany, Mike and Shirley were transferred to Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark. Mike continued to operate heavy equipment in maintaining the base infrastructure, but occasionally got to load the giant C-5A Galaxy cargo plane.

Near the end of the two years in Little Rock, Mike and Shirley decided it was time to leave the Air Force and return to civilian life. They came back to Haverhill and Mike got a job with J & A Construction, and later with Toremco Trucking, both in Methuen.

Then, in 1978, Shirley decided she wanted to join the Air Force Reserves. However, shortly afterwards she changed her mind and told Mike she was signing him up instead. The next weekend Mike reported to the 905th Civil Engineering Squadron at Westover Air Force Base in western Massachusetts. Shortly afterwards, the squadron was reorganized to become the 439th Civil Engineering Squadron.

He remembers the first thing he was told when reporting for duty - get a haircut!

This would be the beginning of Mike Ingham's life-long commitment to the Air Force Reserves.



The 439th prepares to build a school in Honduras

Reservists train one weekend a month and have a two-week deployment once a year. It was during these two-week deployments that Mike got to travel the world.

He remembers well his first assignment, in 1978, to Lakenheath Air Base in England. Mike's main job was to build revetments on the base, but at one point he was given the keys to a tractor-trailer and told to deliver some material. He recalls the harrowing experience of quickly learning how to drive a big rig on the left-hand side of the road without creating an accident!

In 1989, about 50 members of the 439th spent two weeks at the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras. Mike, who was a master sergeant by now, unfortunately was not allowed off base because there was a lot of unrest at the time. The Contras were still fighting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and General Manuel Noriega, as the leader of Panama, was suspected of being a drug kingpin. Mike remembers that the base was crawling with Special Forces troops and, while the 439th was at the base, the U.S.

actually sent forces into Panama to capture Noriega.

In the early 1990s, after the region had settled down, Mike and the 439th were sent to Howard Air Force Base in Panama to renovate buildings for housing units. Mike vividly remembers his fascinating tour of the Panama Canal and its huge locks and ship-towing trams.

He also recalls his experience in Panama City. There was a great disparity between the rich and the poor and it showed. Mike says there were occasionally dead bodies in the streets with buzzards nearby. He had never seen buzzards in a city before.

In the late 1990s, after Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras, Mike and his squadron were again sent to that Central American country, this time to rebuild a school destroyed by the storm. In the area where they were to work, over 2000 people had died and thousands more were still missing. Even with all this hardship, the Hondurans were delighted to see the 439th.

The mayor and a large number of locals turned out to help the Air Force squadron build the new school. With everybody pitching in, the school was completed within the two-week period the 439th was on site.

Twice while Mike was with the 439th, the unit was activated. The first time was in 1990 for operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The 439th spent seven months at Westover, helping to keep the base running



Emblem of the 439th Civil Engineering Squadron, designed by Mike Ingham

Approximately 10 percent of these were women. In recent years, the 439th has been reorganized by adding other units and now numbers about 150 reservists.

When the 439th was first organized into a squadron, Mike offered his art school training and proudly designed the unit's emblem.

Since Mike has belonged to the squadron, the 439th has received several "outstanding unit" awards and Mike is quick to add that he feels privileged to work with what he calls "the finest group of electricians, carpenters, contractors and maintenance people that you could ever imagine."

The 439th Civil Engineering Squadron is part of what is called the Air Force Expeditionary Force.

The Expeditionary Force coordinates the various Air Force Reserve units from around the country so that when one unit leaves an assignment, another seamlessly takes its place. This provides continuity until the task is completed.

During much of Mike's time in the reserves, he used his specialized training and expertise to Haverhill's benefit.

He has worked at the city's wastewater plant, in the highway department, at the water department, and for the past 11 years he has been Director of Veterans' Services.

Mike and Shirley have two children: Michael Robert Ingham and Joseph Aldan Ingham; and two grandchildren.

Michael Robert followed in his parent's footsteps and spent five years in the Air Force as a helicopter mechanic, servicing the H-60 Black Hawk transport helicopters used by the Special Forces. Joseph is currently a police officer in Haverhill.

Michael Ingham, we thank you for your 33 years of service to our country. Shirley and Michael Robert, we also thank you for your years of Air Force service.

To nominate a veteran to be honored as a "Valley Patriot of the Month," please email us at valleypatriot@aol.com, or call us at (978) 557-5413

During most of Mike Ingham's association with the 439th, there were about 100 reservists in the squadron.