

More than just a game, One Shepherd is intense military simulation

Platte County, with its proximity to the military base in Leavenworth, Kan., has always had a strong connection with the military.

This connection is illustrated by a Platte City man who has turned his lifelong relationship with the military into an entrepreneurial endeavor. Self-professed “Army brat” Christopher Larsen, Weston native Jeff McGhay and their buddies liked to play simulated war games while growing up in Weston. Over the years, their games turned into something more, eventually morphing into a military simulation sport known as One Shepherd, akin to paintball on steroids. Larsen said that while One Shepherd has a long history, this is the first time it has gone commercial.

“One Shepherd has been around since 1981 and was started right here in Platte County,” said Larsen, who graduated from West Platte High School in 1985 and went on to spend nine years in the United States Army as an infantryman, completed a tour of Iraq as a military advisor and is currently a private military contractor who has worked with the Command and General Staff College in Leavenworth. “There was no junior ROTC program at that time, so in a sense we created our own.”

Larsen said that One Shepherd is different from paintball and laser tag in several ways — primarily, that real weapons are used (with blanks), no projectile is fired and unlike laser tag, which uses infrared like a garage door opener, real lasers are used. Private or public ground is usually leased for the gaming events, which can take anywhere from one day to a week to complete on anywhere from 50 to 1,500 acres. One Shepherd hosts events in the Midwest and on both coasts, with plans for more as knowledge of the program grows.

Larsen said the laser system used by One Shepherd represents the first commercial use of MILES, or Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System, which has been used almost exclusively by the military, as well as for some law enforcement applications.

“MILES emits a laser every time you pull the trigger and it can be attached to every combat system the military uses and it has been for four decades,” Larsen said. “When the laser hits its target, MILES monitors everything including time and date of engagement, what weapon system was engaged, what target was hit and at what distance and what the result was — whether it was a kill shot or a near miss.”

Larsen said that to think of One Shepherd as a game would be selling it short, as much of the focus is on instructing the participants, who are often current and former soldiers.

“We are a mil-sim (military simulation) program that uses real weapons and blanks, similar to what Civil War and other re-enactors use,” Larsen said. “The re-enactors use the same platform to teach history, while we’re using it to teach leadership and decision-making skills.

“What’s unique about us is that we’re at the crossroads between gamers and re-enactors. Many young students spend more than 20 hours a week playing online games, and we wanted to be able to teach with that level of engagement.”

One Shepherd is now divided into three different segments: 1) a Student Leadership program (SLP) for ages 14-plus who are working towards a degree - this program is subsidized and requires nominal fees from students; 2) SQUAD-GODS, a mil-sim gaming program which is open to the public; and 3) Team Development Studies (TDS), a training program which teaches decision-making principles and how to apply them.

All programs are led by a cadre of instructors from all four branches of the military, National Rifle Association instructors and competitive shooters.

For a recent event, One Shepherd had 59 participants on the field for a SLP program, most of who were Marines in the University of Missouri's NROTC Semper Fi Association. The next scheduled event for One Shepherd will be a one-day event beginning at 8 a.m. Feb. 23 in Rushville. For more information, visit One Shepherd's Web site at 1shepherd.com.

Larsen has also written three books —“Light Infantry Tactics,” which was published by Author House in 2005 and is available now; “Paintball and Airsoft Battle Tactics,” published by Voyageur Press and available in this month; and “The Small Unit Tactics SMARTbook,” which will be published by The Lightning Press as a field manual supplemental book and available in June.

Interested persons can also check out Larsen's mil-sim radio program, “Battle Rattle,” which airs at 9 p.m. Mondays on KCXL (1140 AM) out of Liberty. The radio show can also be heard online at kcxl.com.

County drug card available

Platte County residents without prescription drug coverage now have one more possible tool to help them save money — a prescription drug discount card offered through Platte County.

The card is now available at the Platte County Administration Center and Health Department in Platte City, as well as the Health Department Annex in Riverside and is one of the County's perks of membership in the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Presiding Commissioner Betty Knight and other County staff have been working to implement the card program in Platte County for the last few months, and she is pleased to offer it to Platte County residents. Knight said the program is already in use in many member counties, and Clay County was presenting the program to its residents this month as well.

Not insurance, the card is a free discount card honored by most pharmacies. Administered for NACo by Caremark Rx, the card requires no enrollment or membership cost and can be used by all county residents regardless of age, income or existing health coverage. Savings average 20 percent, depending on the prescription, and cardholders are eligible for higher discounts on three-month supplies of certain drugs through a mail-order program.

“We want to get the word out and get people to utilize this and save money,” Knight said.

The Commissioners have coordinated with the Platte County Health Department and Platte County Senior Services was also consulted by the County to determine the card's impact on seniors. After a few months trial period, Knight said the County will review the program to see how it's working for County residents. Mary Jo Everhart, executive director of the Health Department, said she was proud to assist the county in launching the discount program. With the Health Department's own primary care clinic seeing many Platte County residents in need, the discount card is an additional tool the Health Department can use to assist people.

“Any time we can help people keep money in their pockets that is a good thing,” Everhart said. Cathy Macken of Senior Services said while the card may not be of use to seniors covered under most Medicare Part D plans, it can be used on drugs not covered by Part D.

“For those seniors in that donut hole that's not covered, it may be of use,” she said.

The discount card does not replace traditional insurance, and those seniors wanting to find out if any drugs not covered under the twisty Medicare system may want to check with their provider before using the County card.

But even for those who cannot benefit from the card due to insurance, it may still have value — for the four-legged members of the family. Prescription pet drugs that may be purchased at a private pharmacy are discounted under the program as well.

“We hear a lot of people take advantage of it for their pets,” Knight said. “Their medicine can be just as expensive as ours.”

A map of all participating pharmacies in the County is available from Platte County Planning and Zoning. In northern Platte County, participating pharmacies are the Weston Pharmacy in Weston and Miller Professional Pharmacy and CVS Pharmacy in Platte City. In the southern end of the County, Wal-Mart, as well as other chain and grocery store pharmacies are participating in the program, as well as several independent pharmacies including Choice, Star Medical and Advantage pharmacies.

Parkville OKs more water suit legal fees

While the final result may not be as good as Parkville residents may have hoped, the Board of Aldermen did receive some good news from the attorney who fought rate increases from Missouri American Water last year.

The Board approved an additional \$8,000 payment for previously undetermined legal services to Jeremiah Finnegan of Finnegan, Conrad and Peterson, the attorney who handled the case in 2007 for Parkville and some other local entities such as Park University and the National which ultimately resulted in a water increase of 20 percent instead of the water company’s proposed 25 percent increase. Finnegan said that five percent difference saved the residents represented by the entities more than \$140,000 per year on their water bills, of which approximately 40 percent — or \$56,000 — came from Parkville. Parkville Mayor Kathy Dusenbery said she thought those savings meant the legal proceedings were worth the effort.

“While we didn’t get the water rate decrease we wanted, we did make some headway,” Dusenbery said. “The Board does need to be aware that this comes up every three years. Hopefully next time Riverside will step up and join us. I do wish we could put our heads together and work better with the water company and not have to do battle with them every three years.”

In other business, the Board:

- Went into executive session both prior to and after the regular meeting presumably to discuss the employment status of administrative assistant Deborah Hammond, who according to media reports has been placed on paid leave while an outside investigator looks into allegations of her falsifying her time cards. No action was taken by the Board as of press time. City officials have declined to comment, citing that the matter is a personnel issue. The Citizen has made Sunshine Law requests for any City documents pertaining to the issue. Look for further coverage in future issues.
- Issued a proclamation read by Dusenbery and presented to Park University officials in memory of the late Jerry Hauptmann, a longtime faculty member of Park College.

“There are several important people who have helped make Parkville what it is today, and he is one of them,” Dusenbery said. “He truly valued democracy because of his immigration to the United States.”

- Scheduled a work session for 6 p.m. Feb. 12 to further discuss using tax increment financing (TIF) for the proposed Parkville Market Place development, which would add approximately 45,000 square feet of retail space to an area near Parkville Commons. The project is slated for a plot of land approximately six acres in size that has deemed to be of limited use otherwise near the intersection of Bell Road and Highway 45.

- Tabled approval of an ordinance prohibiting the feeding of deer in Parkville until the next meeting. Police Chief William Hudson did tell the Board that he would like to see some language in the ordinance removed, making it in essence a policy instead of a law to enforce.

- Approved an ordinance accepting the conveyance of a portion of Brink Myers Road near the intersection of I-435 and Hwy. 45 from Platte County to the City of Parkville. The section of road, approximately one mile long, is located near Brush Creek and the Thousand Oaks development. The City annexed property in 2000 to the south and west of Brink Myers Road, but did not annex the road itself because of the condition it was in. Since then, the road has been improved and the annexation was made at the recommendation of City staff.
- In work session, heard a report from Phil Estes, a project engineer with the City of Olathe, Kan., about options Parkville has in pursuing a quiet zone limiting train horns at railroad crossings in town. See future issues of *The Citizen* for more coverage of this matter.