

DRAFT 12/21/06

Op-Ed Submission to the Post-Intelligencer

By Randy Hamlin, Mayor of Snohomish and Dr. William Mester, Superintendent of Schools for the Snohomish School District

We read with great interest the article in the Seattle P-I about the threats made against Brett Karch, a student and JROTC member whose leg was severely injured when a ceremonial cannon exploded near him during a Snohomish High School football game. As a result of an ongoing investigation, criminal charges have been forwarded to their prosecutor by the City of Everett against one of the two individuals who apparently placed threats against Brett while he was hospitalized in Everett.

Like many of the P-I's readers, we are both saddened and angry about this incident. It appears that Brett Karch has been victimized by one or two individuals who displayed an inhuman lack of compassion and a wildly misplaced sense of values. We were shocked to read that an injured high school student would be threatened—while still in his hospital bed—by one or more adults more concerned about maintaining the tradition of this cannon's use during football games than they are about his well-being and recovery.

The P-I story and its blog site resulted in generating nearly 400 emails sent to the City of Snohomish. Many of these email messages understandably expressed outrage at the idea of a student being threatened by adults who wanted to ensure the continuance of this football game tradition. We were dismayed, however, in seeing that many of these emails also asserted that such behavior by these individuals may somehow represent the values of our community.

We would encourage the P-I's readers to not judge an entire community by the actions of a very few. Snohomish is a town of 9,000 people and the school district area that feeds our single high school contains 30,000 people. In fact, the Snohomish community and school district have reached out to support Brett Karch and his family.

In the two weeks of hospital confinement Brett received regular visits from teachers, school and district administrators and students representing JROTC and student body. Several hundred get well cards were sent to Brett from the high school students; the football team sent Brett an autographed football to express their support. In November, JROTC students went to Brett's house to bring his recliner from home to the school so he could attend the JROTC annual ball. He was also warmly greeted by his high school peers at the annual Veterans' Day Assembly, where he was honored for his service to JROTC and Snohomish High School. Additionally, significant assistance to the Karch family has been coordinated through a local community church. Unfortunately, it appears one or two people have tarnished this reputation by their behavior.

Most people of our community were unaware of what was happening because the City of Everett police have investigated quietly as is the normal course in such criminal matters. We anticipate now that information is being released, our community will continue to reach out to Brett and his family during his recovery.

We encourage Brett Karch and his family not to be intimidated by anyone who would expect anything less than honesty in this matter. We also urge swift and just outcomes for any individuals found guilty of making threats against this young man. These are the values that we believe truly represent the vast majority of our community.