

# VALLEY NEWS

## In Tunbridge, a Benefit Dance for a Fallen Soldier

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TUNBRIDGE — More than two years after Rose Loving's partner died in Afghanistan, she is taking the first steps to raise money for a school there.

And one of those steps is a dance where Loving will collect donations for the school in honor of John Thomas "Tom" Stone, 52, the National Guardsman from Pomfret who was killed in battle in late March 2006. "I wanted to do something in his memory that he would be proud of," said Loving, a Tunbridge resident.

The dance will take place in Barrett Hall in South Strafford at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday. Loving suggests a donation of \$10 per person or \$20 per family.

Loving is working with a Vermontor who runs a small nonprofit that provides assistance to Afghanistan and other areas in crisis. She and Direct Aid International, the nonprofit, have a goal of collecting \$20,000 this year for the school, and plan to deliver the money to Afghanistan next summer.

Stone served three deployments in Afghanistan with the Vermont National Guard from 2002 to 2006.

On his second deployment, he converted an old cargo container into a medical clinic where he treated Afghans in Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province. Stone was a medic for the Special Forces.

During a nighttime battle with the Taliban in western Afghanistan, Stone was shot and killed, along with a Canadian soldier. A military investigation determined that he had been shot twice with a machine gun operated within a U.S. Special Forces compound.

Prior to his time as a Guardsman, Stone completed an eight-year walk around the world that took him

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Tom Stone, left, treats a child in Afghanistan in 2003.  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ROSE LOVING

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from Pomfret, where he lived at that time, to New Zealand, China, Russia and beyond. He joined the armed forces in 1971.

News of Stone's death shook Loving, who had begun a relationship with him after he returned from his walk around the world in 2000. The news that he was killed by friendly fire and long investigation into the incident was a "double-whammy," Loving said.

"I miss Tom more today than I ever have," she said.

Loving, a yoga instructor and former landscaper, started to think about creating a school in Stone's memory about a year and a half ago, she said. She remembers Stone's devotion to children, who flocked to him. She has pictures of him treating babies and walking around with children in Mazar e-Sharif.

She read *Three Cups of Tea*, the memoir of Greg Mortenson, who raised money for and founded a girls' school in Pakistan. Mortenson is also the founder of the Central Asia Institute, which raises money for girls' schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This, coupled with meeting the founder of Direct Aid International, gave Loving a better idea of how to make the school a reality.

Earlier this year, Loving spoke with an acquaintance of Stone's from the National Guard and told him about her ambition to build a school in Afghanistan. He gave her the name of Direct Aid International's founder, Jonathan Hoffman, who has been raising funds for projects in Afghanistan since 2001. Hoffman has also been involved with projects in other regions of the world, and his nonprofit's Web site says it is "dedicated to bringing a sense of normalcy to crisis situations."

In the past several years, Hoffman has developed a system for completing such projects as Loving's school.

Hoffman said the size of the school will depend on how much money he and Loving can collect. Neither he nor Loving know what village will host the school, but they plan for it to be located in Herat province, which borders Iran in western Afghanistan. Some villages Hoffman works in already have schools, but they might be roof-less or have other structural problems.

All the donated money goes to the construction of the school, Hoffman said. He said he flies to Afghanistan using his own money in the summer, when he goes on vacation from teaching at the Essex Center of Technology, and brings the money.

When he gets to Afghanistan, he usually gives the funds to a local official, who manages the money for whatever village is being served. Most of his projects have been in the Gazni



Master Sgt. Tom Stone, a Vermont National Guardsman, walks with children in Afghanistan. He was killed in battle in 2006.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ROSE LOVING

province, where he works with a member of the Afghanistan Parliament. For this project, he is collaborating with an Afghan general.

Loving said she has been in touch with National Guard members to see if they want to be involved in the project. She said the Guard itself is not involved with the effort, but members serving the area are welcome.

Once he gives them the money for the school, Hoffman usually allows the local Afghans to oversee its construction and management. He said he does not stipulate whether the school serves girls or boys. He only specifies what building materials the village uses. He usually asks for a community to match one-third of the cost in labor or materials, though he has compromised on that in the past.

The summer after construction, which in this case would be 2010, Hoffman returns to Afghanistan to see the finished school. Loving is planning to go with him and place a plaque commemorating Stone, she said, adding, "It's a great project to show that we care."

The dance is also in honor of Teddi Politis, a former employee of Standing Stone Perennial Farm in South Royalton who died of cancer. The owner of the business, who knew Stone, has organized it, but is allowing Loving to use it as a fundraiser.