

## JROTC returns



STEPHANIE DOWELL/POST-TRIBUNE

**Ian Lundstrom, 16, laughs as his hair is shaved at Hobart High School. "It was like a mop. And it was so thick, we thought it was going to jam the clippers," said fellow JROTC freshman cadet Rachel Powell, 15.**

**See Jerry Davich's column on Page A3**

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ROP

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## JROTC: A place to be yourself



A crowd of fellow freshmen cadets gather round as Becca Richmond, 15, takes clippers Thursday to the 3-inch-long hair of Ian Lundstrom, 16, at the JROTC building at Hobart High School. Lundstrom wanted his hair cut for the JROTC awards banquet later that evening, even though short haircuts are not a requirement for JROTC, stressed his superiors.

PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE DOWELL/POST-TRIBUNE



# And most in Hobart unit don't join service



**JERRY  
DAVICH**

**R**emember the fish-bowl, pressure-cooker days of high school, when fitting in meant everything and belonging to a group meant unspoken acceptance, at least for a semester?

Remember all the unofficial sub-groups during your own high school days — the jocks and potheads, rah-rahs and brains, freaks and geeks, or whatever?

Do you also remember those Junior ROTC soldiers-in-training who marched around in uniform once a week and politely called teachers "sir" or "ma'am," making you look bad in class?

Well it turns out I was wrong about them.

Oh, they still wear those incredibly uncomfortable looking uniforms once a week, and I even caught one last week saying "yes, sir" to a teacher.

But I was wrong about them being in training for military service, and also about the JROTC program serving as a minor league farm system for new recruits.

"We don't push the military on our cadets," said retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Scott Buhmann, senior Army Instructor of Hobart High School's Junior ROTC program.

I recently visited the school's JROTC program, resurrected this year after a long absence at the school. There, while uniformed cadets marched in a field outside the school — "left, right, left right left" — retired U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Leo Marshall pointed to the door of the JROTC headquarters.

A sign stated its mission,



**ABOVE:** Meggan Wentz, 15 (far left), helps Becca Richmond with her collar as freshman JROTC cadets try on their dress uniforms and make adjustments. **TOP:** A freshman JROTC cadet adjusts his service bar as cadets get fitted into their dress uniforms.

"To motivate young people to be better citizens."

Marshall, an Army instructor at the school and former 113th Engineer Battalion soldier, told me that he and Buhmann have even talked more than one young cadet out of military service.

"They were promised too much," he said.

Marshall and Buhmann, by the way, are not allowed to refer young cadets to the Armed Forces strictly because of their JROTC ties and duties.

I didn't know that.

And if they didn't have those JROTC ties, they would be eligible for \$2,000 per each referral, Buhmann said.

I didn't know that either.

Also, less than one-fourth of JROTC cadets march into the military after high school, Marshall noted.

So, the two veteran soldiers are often left with a group of young students in serious need of belonging, acceptance and uniformed protection from the other fish-bowl school groups.

And we all remember get-

ting ambushed at some point, right?

Along the way, Buhmann and Marshall teach their cadets the JROTC's credo, painted on the wall inside the office: "Character. Teamwork. Commitment. Desire."

They teach these seemingly boring life skills through more interesting lesson plans, such as marksmanship, navigational mapping and weapon skills. Whatever works, I say.

The program's students range from a motley crew of rowdy knuckleheads to a few sharply focused and well-disciplined kids with serious career plans.

You know, typical teenagers.

Thursday night at Hobart's American Legion Post 54, these typical teenagers were awarded something they need just as much as a sense of belonging — recognition for their achievements.

Several community groups came together Thursday night to show these kids that they belong and that they're a part of something bigger than their own lives.

These groups included the Indiana National Guard, Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, Hobart Chamber of Commerce and VFW.

Last night all of the teens received public praise through pins, citations and verbal kudos, and four of them — Traveena Smith, 15, Erick Pistello, 16, Anthony Gilyan, 18, and Max Wineinger, 19 — were honored with even higher praise, the Superior Cadet Award.

Surprisingly, of the 41 cadets in Hobart's JROTC program, only three are planning to serve Uncle Sam after graduation. The rest will soon be marching among us civilians.

We can only hope the essential human qualities of belonging, acceptance and recognition — drilled into them daily under Buhmann and Marshall — will serve them, and us, long after they stop wearing those junior soldier Army uniforms.

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