

# Chagrin VALLEY TIMES

Check out our e-edition at [ChagrinValleyToday.com](http://ChagrinValleyToday.com)! Want to go green? Call 440-247-5335.

## Kenston's Weninger lived as Marine, died as Marine

By **TONY LANGE**

He was 33 credit hours short of graduating from college when he decided to enlist in the U.S. Marines. His parents encouraged him to finish school, but his mind was made up. After graduating from Kenston

High School in 2010, Wolfgang Kyle Weninger attended Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., to pursue his football career with the Division III Cardinals.



Weninger

The 6-foot-4, 220-pound quarterback then transferred to Valparaiso University in Indiana in hopes of moving up to the Division I level. But when he went from playing time to a redshirt

scout who could only practice, he just lost interest in the sport.

He stepped away from the gridiron and transferred to Kent State University to focus on his academics. He had interest in architecture and psychology,

**Turn to Marine on Page 3**



ISSN 0194-3685

## Marching for justice



Photo by Ryan Grzybowski

More than 100 people marched down Chagrin Boulevard in Woodmere on Friday night as part of a Black Lives Matter protest. Inspirational speakers and community leaders shared their messages before the peaceful crowd held a candlelight vigil for George Floyd, who died in Minneapolis, Minnesota, while in police custody in May. See Story on Page A15.

## Spidalieri says statement was taken out of context

By **SAMANTHA COTTRILL**

Geauga Commissioner Ralph Spidalieri concluded the county board meeting Tuesday morning to address his statements from the previous week regarding the defacing and destruction of monuments being a “shootable offense,” stating his words were “taken out of context” and part of talks outside the meeting.

“The statement that I had was part of a much larger conversation based on less lethal shootable situations,” Mr. Spidalieri said of the June 16 statement, explaining that “it was something that I had directed, actually, with the sheriff, because

he was part of that conversation.”

He said he was “disgusted” with local media, describing the spread of his statement as “irresponsible.”

In a county audio-recorded discussion with Geauga County Sheriff Scott Hildenbrand during last week’s meeting, Commissioner Timothy Lennon and Mr. Spidalieri expressed their support of the sheriff’s department and their opposition to defunding law enforcement. Commissioner James Dvorak was not present at the June 16 meeting.

After their expressed support, Sheriff Hildenbrand informed them that the department is looking to

**Turn to Context on Page 17**

## Dominion pays thousands in fees after gas explosion

By **JULIE HULLETT**

PEPPER PIKE — Dominion Energy has paid \$64,521 in engineering fees to repair Brainard Circle after a 30-inch gas main exploded on Nov. 15, city officials said.

Although much of the repair work has been completed, there is still a long way to go, according to Mayor Richard Bain. The main repair project ended mid-February and the traffic circle reopened. There is more work for the water main, landscaping and asphalt and concrete repairs, City Engineer Don Sheehy said. Dominion must pick up the costs.

There were no injuries at the time of the gas line explosion and fire,

which occurred overnight. Even though the circle is open for traffic, there is still a section of pavement that is a work zone, but Mr. Sheehy said that cars can pass through. That area was temporarily patched last week, he said, because Cleveland Division of Water delayed waterline repairs until later this year, perhaps September or October.

“It was fine, then Cleveland Water had an issue with the repair. There was more damage that wasn’t addressed and they need to go back in and make more repairs,” Mr. Sheehy said last week. “They’re holding off on the work for when

**Turn to Pay on Page 17**

## INSIDE

### News

**Pepper Pike** Axiom continues to pursue zone change. **A2**

**Bainbridge** Fundraising resumes for playground. **A5**

**Chagrin BOE** Options for reopening in fall explored. **A6**

**Solon** Armed robbery at phone store. **A7**

**Region** Local police review policies as groups call for reform. **A8**

**South Russell** Family objects to utility pole in yard. **A9**

**Hunting Valley** County Line Road project nearly completed. **A14**

**Geauga parks** Board expanding to five members. **A14**

**Russell** Trustees see red over dumping at recycling center. **A16**

### Features

**Orange** Teen, mom walk 26 miles to raise awareness of Alzheimer’s. **B1**

**Solon** Mental health advocate Archie Green reaching out to help others. **B1**

### Sports

**Basketball** West G’s Javorek bids farewell to boys hoops. **A4**

Follow us on Facebook: **@chagrinvalleytimes**

CLASSIFIEDS, **B5-12**

EDITORIAL, **A10**

EDUCATION, **B2-3**

OBITUARIES, **B4**

RELIGION, **B3**

SPORTS, **A3-4**

## Marine **continued from Page 1**

among other majors, but he just couldn't find what he was searching for, yet he always had a military interest.

So, the Marines it was.

"It was scary for a parent, and it would not have been my choice for him at that time, but I also understood it," said his mom, Michelle Henry, a Bainbridge Township resident.

"I understood why he felt, after floundering around for those years and not finding what fit him, that this was something that he felt really fit him, and it did," she said. "And looking at this whole thing, he was exactly where he should have been. From all accounts, he was a phenomenal Raider."

Sgt. Wolfgang Kyle Weninger—known as Kyle to his family and childhood friends, and known as Wolf to his military buddies—died during an airborne school training accident June 16 at Fort Benning in Georgia. He was 28 years old.

On June 21, Gov. Mike DeWine ordered, in honor of Sgt. Weninger's life and service, that all U.S. and Ohio flags be flown at half-staff on all public buildings and grounds throughout Geauga County and at the Ohio Statehouse, Vern Riffe Center and Rhodes Tower in Columbus.

"What a tribute, right?" said his dad, Ernie Weninger. "To be recognized that way, I mean, that's incredibly moving. What a tribute, and how I'm moved by that gesture. And with all these people calling from all over the country that we have never met, because we haven't seen him since Christmas, and they were living with him every day, and for some of these comments to be made by senior officers and press releases, that's very touching."

Sgt. Weninger was an honor graduate from boot camp in 2015, served as an armory custodian in a supply chain after it was discovered he was a particular type of color blind and then went on to report to MARSOC, or Marines Forces Special Operations Command, in January 2019 at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

Sgt. Weninger went on to complete MARSOC's seven-month Individual Training Course, a four-phase series that pushes students to their physical and mental limits, which is designed to produce Critical Skills Operators. Upon completing the ITC in October 2019, he earned the coveted Marine special operator insignia and his pin as a Marine Raider.

"The acceptance rate is miniscule, and then the attrition rate is astronomical," said Mr. Weninger, who lives in Concord Township and served four years in the Air Force. "You've got to prove yourself every day for the seven months. You could be on top of the world one week, and you could be gone the next."

The ITC is the equivalent to the Army's Special Forces Q-Course and the Navy SEAL Qualification Training. Sgt. Weninger was among 49 graduates in his ITC class, including 10 officers and 39 enlisted Marines, who became Team 4.

After that, Sgt. Weninger and his fellow Raiders went through four months of language training, and then they went off to the U.S. Army's Basic Airborne Course on May 28 to learn how to become paratroopers at Fort Benning. He was set to graduate from the three-week jump school on Friday, June 19.

But Sgt. Weninger died during a training accident on June 16.

"Like in the movies, everybody seems to know when you have two military men walk up to your door, usually everyone seems to know what that means," Mrs. Henry said. "So, two Marines from the local casualty branch of the Marine Corps went to his dad's house and two Marines came to our home and said there had been an accident."

"They gave us very few details, because they don't really know. And we still don't really know. Because it's an accident, there's going to be an investigation."

An autopsy in Dover, Delaware, is expected to take 10 to 14 days before Sgt. Weninger's body is returned to Ohio for his family to hold services.

In addition to his parents, Sgt. Weninger leaves behind younger brother Drew Weninger, a 2014 Kenston graduate, and half-siblings Milo Henry and McKinley Henry.

"I'm pretty confident that none of this has really sunk in yet at all," Drew Weninger said. "I mean, right now, it seems pretty chaotic. There's not really a lot of time to think about it. There's people coming and going. I mean, you talk about it, but there's just a lot of distractions right now."

Sgt. Weninger, who grew up in Auburn Township and attended Notre Dame Elementary School through sixth grade, was a standout athlete at Kenston, quarterbacking the Bombers' varsity football team to a 6-4 record his senior



Photos courtesy of Kenston High School

**ABOVE: Sgt. Wolfgang Kyle Weninger a 2010 Kenston graduate, quarterbacked the Bombers' varsity football team that went 6-4 his senior campaign.**

**LEFT: Sgt. Weninger also was a captain of the Bombers' varsity hockey team that went 31-3 his senior year.**

year while completing 65 of 118 passes for 754 yards and five touchdowns. Then-junior Justin Brownlow was his favorite target for 307 yards.

He also captained the Bombers' hockey team to a 31-3 record as MVP of the Chagrin Valley Conference his senior year, when he tallied 31 goals and 35 assists on a line with fellow seniors Greg Revak (36 goals, 53 assists) and Colton Deeter (38 goals, 53 assists).

Mr. Weninger said his son was always about team and always the first person to tell a teammate to shake off a bad play, while, at the same time, he was hardest on himself. When he won the league MVP, his first comment was that Revak's and Deeter's names should have been on the trophy, his dad said.

While Sgt. Weninger struggled to find that team dynamic in college, he rediscovered it with the Marines, his dad said.

His mom said the same thing.

"He wanted nothing more than to be a Marine Raider and be with the best of the best," Mrs. Henry said. "It was a team mentality. I want to be part of this team; this is the type of team in my life I want. You know, the loyal, the best, the 'I've got your back no matter what.' He absolutely wanted to be the Critical Skills Operator in special forces and be with this team, this elite team."

In the days after Sgt. Weninger died, his parents received an outpouring of phone calls from fellow Marines and Marine Raiders with whom he served. Even one of his captains reached out and said he was the best shooter on his team, Mrs. Henry said.

The 10 officers who graduated from ITC with Sgt. Weninger are in San Diego, California, getting ready for deployment, but even they took time on Saturday to reach out.

"The things that they said were extraordinary and exactly validated pretty much everything we thought he was—that he was all about the team and he was the leader in those teams," Mr. Weninger said. "He came from supply, when some of these other guys came from recon and all that, and they're going, 'Who's this supply guy?' And here he outperformed them all and was exactly the type of person they were looking for."

Sgt. Weninger's Raider roommate, Zach Hummel, who came from reconnaissance, told Mr. Weninger that the most difficult thing to do in the corps is to lead your peers, and Sgt. Weninger was able to do that.

Drew Weninger, who recently graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and is now in graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said his brother, four years his senior, was always all-inclusive while growing up.

Drew, who played football and lacrosse at Kenston and wore the same No. 4 jersey as his brother, said he always tried to outdo his older brother, especially on the athletic field.

"For me, there was always a sibling rivalry going on, but I think it was one-sided," he said. "He took the higher road usually. I would try to kind of get under his skin, maybe tell him I could beat him in a race or that my high school team went to the playoffs, all that kind of jazz, but he was more proud than anything else; happy with what he did and proud of his sibling."

"He never wanted to get in any kind of argument or rivalry or anything. That's something I kind of always admired about him."

After Sgt. Weninger died, one of his buddies messaged younger brother Drew to send his condolences but also to tell him the story about how his mom suffered a stroke and that Sgt. Weninger ordered a pizza, picked up some flowers and met him at the hospital within an hour.

"He would make people feel like he was genuinely interested in their life and what they were doing," Drew said of his brother. "Hearing that story solidified what I had already thought about him as this genuinely good person who just happened to be a special forces Marine. That just happened to be his occupation, but he was a good dude down to his core."

Mr. Weninger said his son was a decent human being who found meaning in his life, which is all that a parent could hope for, and was a fun-loving kid growing up, but, at the same time, he was no choir boy. He partied as hard as he worked, his dad said.

"He was a handful when he was a youngster," Mr. Weninger said. "He could just be a handful. I have a full head of white hair now, and I think he put it all there."

One of Sgt. Weninger's best Marine buddies outside of his Raider team was Sgt. Jonah Konzen, of Windham, Ohio, just west of Warren.

Ever since they met walking over to the recruiter's office at the same time, they clicked. Sgt. Konzen said.

"It was just an instant friendship that's indescribable," he said. "It was one of those, if I didn't say it, he was thinking it type of deals. It's

one of those things that's once in a lifetime."

A couple years younger, Sgt. Konzen was under the legal drinking age when they became friends, but that didn't stop them from hitting the bar scene together, he said.

"We were both big, tall dudes, and he would sneak me into bars," Sgt. Konzen said. "I would use his motorcycle license to get into bars right after he would, and the bouncer would look at me, and he'd be like, 'We just had a Wolfgang come in here.'"

"And I would act so surprised like, 'No way. No way. You've got to point him out to me.' And the bouncer would be like, 'He's right there.' And I'd walk up to him and be like, 'Your name's Wolf?' and he'd be like, 'Yeah.' And I'd say, 'Me too.'"

Those weren't the only antics Sgt. Weninger was up to in the social scene.

Although he was a tall and fit guy who was often the center of attention, he used to self-deprecate, his parents said. And he'd do it particularly while trying to pick up girls.

"One of his roommates was telling me they used to go out to these clubs and he's talking to some girl quietly and he's self-deprecating and giving her these one-liners, and she just walks away," Mr. Weninger said. "And, with a dead-serious face, he'd say, 'She doesn't know what she's missing.' And these guys would just die laughing at him."

A common theme during this past week has been the description of Sgt. Weninger's larger-than-life personality.

Mrs. Henry said her son's 6-foot-4 stature may have contributed to that, but it was also his character.

"He always had this huge physical presence when he walked into a room," she said. "And lately, the last few days, we've just been saying it's like he was this titan. And then his humor, his personality, his way to talk to everybody and make you feel like he was really interested in what you were saying, I've heard this over and over and over again. All of his friends who were equal in age looked at him as like a big brother."

While Mr. Weninger and Mrs. Henry said they originally wanted their son to finish college and perhaps explore a military branch other than the Marines, they both said he ended up right where he was supposed to be.

Sgt. Weninger wanted to be part of a team as a Marine Raider, and he was very proud of that insignia, they said.

"He had found that thing," Mr. Weninger said. "He had found the thing that he was meant to do. He loved what he did. MARSOC are the best they have, and that was a culmination. He took pride in being a part of that team and having achieved that, and I'm glad he was able to do that in his life, because he had found that fulfillment."

"As tragic as this is, that he's denied the fullness of his life, I find great comfort in knowing that he had found the thing that made his life meaningful. So, he lived life to the fullest, and I like to say he lived as a Marine and he died as one, and he died as one of their best."