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Rocky Mountain High School honors Idaho soldier killed in Afghanistan

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Rebecca Webb, left, Anna Workman, center, and Idaho Lieutenant Governor Janice McGeachin, right, stand on the Rocky Mountain High School football field during a pre-game ceremony honoring Army Green Beret Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Ard.

Jake King/Idaho Press

MERIDIAN — When Dan McKnight decided to host a Veterans Appreciation Night during a Rocky Mountain High School football game, he had a particular veteran in mind: Army Green Beret Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Ard.

“When he died, it just struck a chord with me,” said McKnight, the Rocky Mountain freshman football coach and a veteran.

On Friday, the community gathered to honor the family of former Meridian Medical Technical Charter School student Ard, who was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 29.

Ard joined the U.S. Army in 2011. He became a Green Beret, and rose to the rank of Sergeant 1st Class.

Ard died from wounds sustained in combat in Afghanistan’s Zabul Province, where he fought as a member of the 1st Special Forces Group. He would have been 32 years old in October.

Before the football game between the Griz-

lies and Centennial High School, students, families and veterans watched Lt. Governor Janice McGeachin present a wreath of white daisies to Rebecca Webb, president of the Idaho chapter of the American Gold Star Mothers, who represented Ard’s family during the event. Ard routinely brought his 3-year-old daughter, Reagan, white daisies when he returned home from missions.

A U.S. Army press release offers Ard’s place of birth as Idaho Falls and describes his two deployments in Afghanistan, as well as his decorated military career, which included earning the Bronze Star and the Army Achievement Medal.

Ard was the second Idaho soldier to die in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars this year. If Ard’s death was the result of enemy fire, he would be the 15th American soldier to be killed in action in Afghanistan this year, the *Army Times* reports.

Ard is survived by Reagan, and his wife, Mary, who is pregnant with their second child.

According to a GoFundMe page set up to help the family, Ard met Mary while he was stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, working his way through a special forces qualifications course. He graduated that course in 2015, according to a news release from the U.S. Army. After they married, they moved to Fort Lewis, Washington, where Reagan was born.

News of Ard’s death hit particularly close to home for McKnight.

“We’re two blocks from where he grew up,” McKnight said.

Ard’s sister, Leslie Scoresby, lives just down the street; two of her children attend Rocky Mountain.

Scoresby said she’s glad the Rocky Mountain Veterans Night helped attendees understand the sacrifice that comes with serving. That sacrifice, she said, wasn’t something she understood fully until she lost her brother.

The event was cosponsored by Bring Our Troops Home, a nonprofit McKnight started in January to pressure Congress to bring U.S. troops back from the Middle East.

McKnight is a veteran of 13 years, and served in the Idaho National Guard for 10 years. From 2005 through 2007, he was among the first combat units deployed to Afghanistan.

The GoFundMe campaign — which listed \$15,000 as its original goal — has raised more than \$57,000 as of Friday evening.

Diana Barone, the page’s organizer said in a post Sept. 7 that the amount raised was awe-inspiring.

“Above all else though, Dustin loved his family,” wrote Barone in the original post, created Sept. 5. “Anyone who has ever seen Dustin and Mary together know they were perfect for one another. He was the epitome of what it means to be a family man. He loved Mary and Reagan more than anything, and was excited to have recently found out that Mary is carrying a baby boy.”

Tommy Simmons contributed to this report.

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