

**The following is a collection of newswriting samples authored by Joel O’Dea that originally appeared on [MidHudsonNews.com](http://MidHudsonNews.com) between 2008 and 2013.**

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WEST POINT- The 2010 graduating class of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point made their loved ones proud Saturday afternoon as years of dedication and hard work came to an end during their graduation ceremony in which President Barack Obama called it a “singular honor” to be their Commander in Chief.

The 212<sup>th</sup> graduating class consisted of 1,002 cadets who received their diplomas during Saturday’s ceremony and mostly all were commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the U.S. Army.

“I’m exceptionally proud,” said Lee Overmann of her son Archie Overmann of Colorado Springs Colorado. His family agreed and his twin brother William said that he felt, “honored to be a twin to such an outstanding young gentleman who is going to serve his country well.” Archie said that to him graduation day was a culmination of a life’s worth of dedication and that he planned to continue his service, possibly on to medical school.

2010 graduate Bradley Marren from Charlotte North Carolina had his family by side during what he felt was the completion of just another stepping stone on the way to something greater, “There’s definitely hard times here for four years but it’s definitely y going to be great every day after this graduation.” His father, Bill Marren, felt that for him and his wife it was “touching” to see his son shaking hands with the Commander in Chief.

After the infamous “Hat Toss” Aaron James Takeda was greeted by his whole family from Orange County, California. According to Aaron, the last four years weren’t easy, but it was perseverance that led to Saturday’s excitement.

“He’s got a commitment ahead of him and I’m extremely proud of him for the choice that he’s made and I’m sure that he’s going to have a real nice career in the Army,” said his father Dwayne Takeda.

In light of the ongoing conflict overseas, President Obama said that he was humbled by the fact that many of these cadets knowingly signed up during a time of war and will very soon be seeing an active war zone.

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WEST POINT – As the 2011 class at the United States Military Academy enjoyed their final day before graduation, US First Lady Michelle Obama spoke to the cadets and their families, telling them that their accomplishment is not only a testament to themselves, but to their families as well.

Mrs. Obama made her first appearance ever at the at West Point Friday evening to attend the Class of 2011's graduation banquet where she delivered keynote remarks to some 4,800 cadets and family members.

The First Lady stressed the importance of family saying that it is a basis for what makes great leaders strong.

“Without your families you never would have had the strength to tackle Beast Barracks while your peers back home were enjoying a final carefree summer before college,” she said. “They’re unending love and support provide the very foundation that allows you to stand strong today.”

Looking back on her humble past, Mrs. Obama told the audience that although she did not have much money, she had more than enough of what really matters, the unwavering love and support of family.

“We had parents who showed us by example that if we worked hard enough, if we kept ourselves grounded, and held fast to certain values then we could be anything that we dreamed of,” said Mrs. Obama.

The First Lady also touched on her involvement with the nationwide campaign called “Joining Forces” which calls on all Americans to recognize, honor, and support our nation’s military families.

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NEW WINDSOR - Despite an increasingly busy schedule General David Petraeus made it home to the Hudson Valley to honor those who sustained injury in combat as he delivered keynote remarks at a tribute ceremony to the Purple Heart Hall of Honor held Friday at Anthony’s Pier 9 in New Windsor.

During the ceremony over 120 Purple Heart recipients and their families were personally honored by General Petraeus. He expressed his admiration for all that the Purple Heart Hall of Honor has achieved for soldiers spanning all generations stating that nothing means more to those overseas than knowing their sacrifices are appreciated.

“Our nation’s Purple Heart recipients are heroes, heroes whose service and courage deserve our eternal gratitude. Their stories are of commitment, valor, and sacrifice.”

General Petraeus told those who wear the Purple Heart that they form an unbroken chain of heroes who have answered the call to defend our country saying, “Thank you for what you did for our country as you earned the badge of honor that is sought by none but respected by all.”

Over 1,000 people were in attendance Friday afternoon showing their support for the Purple Heart Hall of Honor’s efforts to archive the stories of combat wounded veterans in a single location so that they can be accessed, remembered, and revered by the community at large.

According to Friday’s Master of Ceremonies Colonel Dick Esau the Purple Heart is awarded to soldiers who were wounded or killed in combat and there are currently 1.8 million people who have received the Purple Heart since World War I. Of these, he said, only about 120,000 are archived in the Hall of Honor.

“It’s a way of telling our younger generations not to forget what happened in WWII,” said WWII Veteran George Fisher who served in Patton’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Army during the Battle of the Bulge before being wounded early in 1945. “It’s a wonderful institution, our hall of honor, and I hope the young people take advantage of it and listen to some of the tapes that they’ve made.”

Fisher echoed the remarks made by General Petraeus stating that the existence of the Hall of Honor to recognize Purple Heart veterans is absolutely significant to troops who are overseas today in the sense that it adds another level of meaning to the already elite group who wear the award.

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POUGHKEEPSIE - The residency status of New York State senatorial candidate Didi Barrett became one of the focal points of a debate forum held Wednesday morning by the Dutchess County Chamber of Commerce at the Grand Hotel in Poughkeepsie as her opponent incumbent Senator Stephen Saland made special note of her addresses in both Millbrook and New York City.

Barrett said during her remarks that she intends to bring unity to the State and is willing to be a bridge between New York City and the upstate regions.

According to Senator Saland, “My opponent may be more qualified to be a bridge between upstate and downstate because of the fact that she does reside in Manhattan as well as in Millbrook.”

When questioned after the forum about the amount of time she spends in Millbrook Barrett responded, “For the last four years I have been living in Millbrook full-time. My husband works

in New York City and we do have an apartment on Central Park West. That is his base and my base is up here.”

Other prominent issues to arise were the passing of the MTA payroll tax, the strengthening of the economy, the creation of jobs, and the changing of a dysfunctional status quo in Albany.

Saland called the MTA payroll tax the “most egregious” tax he has ever witnessed and said that its passing is a result of the continuous immovable partisanship in Albany. He also stressed how important it is to not impose harsh taxes on employers and incentivize the private sector in order to encourage business and job creation.

Barrett agreed with Saland’s opposition of the payroll tax saying that it’s an issue that should have been dealt with through negotiations within the Senate before even being passed. She opposed raising current taxes and creating new ones as a means for generating money for the State’s operations while pointing towards exploiting the Hudson Valley’s economic engines as the primary means of driving business and employment into the region.

Overall, the candidates’ opinions differed greatly on only one topic; marriage equality rights. When asked during the debate how each of them would vote should they see another marriage equality bill reach the Senate floor Barrett said that “yes” she would while Saland supported the institution of a civil union but believed that marriage should remain between a man and a woman.

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RHINEBCK - Hundreds of onlookers hit the streets of Rhinebeck Saturday in anticipation of catching a glimpse of any famous faces in town for Chelsea Clinton's wedding.

Just a few spotted on Saturday were: Actor Ted Danson and his wife actress Mary Steenburgen, wedding dress designer Vera Wang, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and one of Bill Clinton’s former advisors Vernon Jordan.

Despite the general hubbub, the streets were relatively calm Saturday compared to the parade of people who surrounded former President Bill Clinton Friday afternoon as he walked through Rhinebeck.

The mere presence of the event had the community as a whole glowing with happiness.

"I saw Bill Clinton twice last night and Hillary once," said Village of Rhinebeck Trustee Terry Gipson. "That doesn't happen every day although they do come here quite a bit."

According to Gipson, the scene on Saturday was about everyone coming out and enjoying their community.

Rhinebeck local Rachel Cavell said that she found it hard to stay home. “I think it creates a vibe and an exciting atmosphere. It certainly puts Rhinebeck on the map and I hope that’s a good thing.”

Numerous local shops displayed signs congratulating the newlyweds while residents and merchants alike couldn't be more excited about Rhinebeck being in the international spotlight.

“We get a lot of people that come and look at the town then they come to the store and see what the store is and then we get a lot of shoppers in here,” said Diane Reilly of Present Perfect designer consignment shop in Rhinebeck.

She noted that the exposure and the foot traffic were both great things for the town bringing a number of outsiders right into downtown Rhinebeck.

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HIGHLAND - Since before the turn of the millennium an exodus has been brewing and in just a few weeks hundreds of millions of 17-year cicada will emerge from the ground to blanket the Hudson Valley region.

According to Ulster County Cornell Cooperative Extension Research Entomologist Peter Jentsch the last time this 17-year species, or *Magicalada*, emerged was in 1996. Since then they have been feeding quietly on the roots of trees, but when environmental temperatures are warm enough the immature cicada will burrow out of the soil, mature into adulthood and complete the final stages of their life cycle.

This should be about the end of May or the first week in June, Jentsch said.

Deciduous trees such as maple, oak, ash, beech, elm, and cedar are optimal habitats for cicada, Jentsch explained, and once they've emerged they typically cluster and stay around the environment and whatever tree or groups of trees they were feeding off of as nymphs.

“In the Hudson Valley we see very high populations right along the river,” stated Jentsch, “So here in Highland we have high populations, but across the river in Dutchess county toward Tivoli they have very large forested areas of oak and other deciduous trees that these insects prefer and the populations there are just astounding.”

By “astounding” populations Jentsch is referring to an estimated average of 3 million insects per acre in the Hudson Valley. This number is just an average, he explained, and it is variable based on the local environment's proximity to water, deciduous forest density, and level of urbanization or agriculture.

More urbanized areas can expect less than the estimated average whereas more optimal areas can expect upward of 5-7 million insects per acre.

Campers and country folk should be familiar with the distinctive song of the annual cicada, but while the 17-year species is here there will be a near constant piercing rhythmic singing coming from about 1 ½ million males per acre, Jentsch explained.

It is important to understand that the world is not coming to an end, he added, and that by mid-summer they will all die off becoming food for the birds.

Although they will be emerging, signing, and mating en masse these insects pose no physical threat to humans. They do not migrate in swarms creating clouds of biblical proportion that will blot out the sun; as locusts do. They do not bite, nor will they attack, and according to Jentsch the only real danger is caused by individuals who overreact and take inappropriate action to eradicate them.

He said the most significant health risk is created when individuals douse their home and property with insecticides exposing themselves, their families, and their pets to unnecessarily high levels of poison.

The most immediate cause for concern is amongst commercial agriculturalists.

According to Jentsch, “When they do attach themselves onto roots of trees they do reduce the vigor of the tree, sometimes they reduce the overall growth, and if it’s a fruit tree like apple it will reduce the quality of the fruit, the size, the number of fruit, the type of flowering that it goes through and so controlling these insects on fruit trees is fairly important for agriculturalists.”

As he explained the potential for agricultural injury Jentsch spoke in detail about how the adult female cicada deposits its eggs in first and second year wood significantly compromising the structural integrity of the tree. He said the process of depositing eggs causes unnecessary stress on the tree and fruit bearing branches break under the weight of developing crops.

If action is not taken to control these populations fruit crops will be lost, he said.

There are insecticides specific for this species of cicada and growers will have to implement them during the period of emergence up until their eggs are laid.