

Docu-drama from page C1

"But when it's the rank and file it's a different matter. They are prisoners of war in our country," said Riegler.

Initially, the Pentagon explained the ailments as side effects from the anti-nerve-agent pills which troops were ordered to take.

Popular speculation is that soldiers were exposed to low levels of acrin, a nerve gas carried by southern winds from Iraqi chemical plants that were bombed by U.S. planes.

As the investigation broadened, Pentagon estimates of the number of soldiers possibly affected increased from a few hundred to 20,000. Riegler estimates that it's probably closer to 100,000.

The Pentagon's reluctance to admit that soldiers may have been exposed to toxic chemicals is a combination of stonewalling and an unwillingness to pay health benefits to injured soldiers, said Riegler.

In addition, some claim, if the Pentagon admits the devastating consequences to U.S. troops, potential losses of support in North Korea might be further encouraged to develop chemical weapons.

Riegler is quick to point out the irony. "These biological germs were shipped from the U.S. to Iraq," he said. "That's too embarrassing for the Pentagon."

What: "Thanks Of A Grateful Nation," a drama based on the official investigation into the U.S. military's denial of soldiers' exposure to toxic chemical weapons during the Persian Gulf War.

When: 8 p.m. Sunday, June 31, and 9 p.m. Thursday, June 11.

Cable television: Showtime.

Cast: Brian Dennehy (as Sen. Don Riegler), Ted Danson, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Steven Weber, Matt Keesler and Marg Helgenberger.

"Thanks of a Grateful Nation" applies heart-wrenching stories of veterans speaking on camera along with re-enactments of those coming to grips with bizarre ailments. In some cases, new horrors born to Gulf War veterans suffered grotesque deformities.

The combination of actual war footage, testimonials and re-enactments gives "Thanks of a Grateful Nation" a chilling realism. Included in the re-enactments are the congressional hearings chaired by Riegler, who is portrayed by longtime actor Brian Dennehy ("The Jackie Presser Story," "Cocoon," "Gorky Park").

Unlike more traditional documentaries, the docu-drama format takes viewers into the intricate

situations of those suffering with Gulf War Syndrome. Yet, at times, the transition from real-life to re-enactment can be jarring. That is a minor criticism since the purpose of the docu-drama isn't solely cinematic.

Without apologies, "Thanks of a Grateful Nation" is a catharsis for Gulf War veterans, and a stinging indictment of a government that turns away from the same people who stood in the line of its defense.

"I never imagined that they'd make a movie," said Riegler. "But this is a way to help the American public understand what's happened to many veterans."

"All that was heard after the war was 'We won, we won,'" said Riegler. "When these vets went to the VA hospitals, they were told nothing was wrong with them. But their lives were taken away."

Only if the Pentagon faces the facts and "comes clean," according to Riegler, will there not be a likelihood of a situation like Gulf War Syndrome will occur again.

As a politician, he recognizes the potential of "Thanks to a Grateful Nation" to compel the American public to demand answers.

"Public opinion is a very, very powerful tool in this country," the issue.

'Heidi Chronicles': another view

"Feminism has the negative stereotype of a middle-aged lesbian who hates men, is childless, bitter and regularly burns her bras," said Jennifer Rembiz of Livonia. "This play, 'The Heidi Chronicles' is being presented by late teens and twentysomethings, and their generation ironically shuns the label of feminist."

Rembiz is directing and producing Jack-in-The-Box Productions' presentation of "The Heidi Chronicles" by Wendy Wasserstein 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, June 11-13, at the Livonia Civic Center Library Auditorium (off Five Mile Road between Farmington Road and Merriman) in Livonia. Tickets are \$8 adults, or \$5 senior adults and students with ID. Call (734) 797-JACK for tickets/information.

"Wasserstein is definitely not a feminist in the stereotypical manner but a woman who strives for the end of women's subordination to men," said Bouchard. "Our company supports Wasserstein's style of feminism, and also believes that all people, men and women alike should fulfill their potential."

Jack-in-the-Box Productions was founded in 1995 by Rembiz and her friends who are college actors.

Now 20, Rembiz said she was introduced to Wasserstein's work five years ago in a summer theater workshop.

"It really struck me," she said. "It is an actor's duty to inform the audience, as well as entertain the audience. This play touches on a lot of great issues that all people should be able to go all out and earn their 'A' in life. It challenges stereotypes about men and women, but it's a really humorous, fun show to go to."

Wasserstein's Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award-winning play, "The Heidi Chronicles" traces the coming of age of Heidi Holland, a successful art historian who makes her way through a rapidly changing world from 1966 to 1989. The play begins when Heidi is 17, and ends when she's in her 40s.

A feminist herself, Wasserstein concentrates on the Baby boomers and their roles in society, constantly reiterating that "everyone deserves to fulfill their potential."

All of the cast members, many of them theater majors at the University of Michigan, University of Detroit Mercy, and Oakland University, have been involved in community, educational and professional theater.

The cast includes Rebecca Fried of Southfield as Heidi, Christopher Cain of Southfield as Scoop, Kevin Hughes (Peter) and Lisa Ebersole of Canton (Susan).

Supporting roles are played by Don Milewski of Farmington Hills (Chris, Ray, Mark, Steve, Walter), Stephanie Siemon of Southfield (Becky), Karri Washburn of Southfield (Debbie), and Amanda Lange of Farmington Hills (April).

Production staff members include Rembiz, and Gina Guersso of Livonia (stage manager).

Rembiz says you won't want to miss this humorous, thought-provoking play, made possible by a talented troupe of young performers.

"We like to leave our audience with something to think about," said Rembiz. "We also want to entertain them."

Conference from page C1

A reworked bill proposed recently by state Sen. Michael Bouchard (R-Birmingham) would amend the Metropolitan Council Act, which established a board to oversee the disbursement of tax revenues generated by a millage. Voters would have to approve of any mill increases.

"The clock ran out on the tri-county tax," said Bouchard. "This new bill is more politically viable."

Cultural tax

In theory, however, the intent of a plan for a cultural tax for a .5 mill property assessment remains intact. The funds would be earmarked to cover operating expenses at the region's 14 tier-one cultural institutions, such as the DIA, Meadow Brook, Cran-

brook art and science museums and the Detroit Zoo.

Bouchard's bill addresses political realities. For instance, Oakland County officials, who were publicly skeptical of the tri-county tax proposal, are now eager to discuss the details of the revised plan.

In the state's most affluent county that would generate nearly one-half of the estimated \$40 million tax revenue, county officials wanted assurances that they'd have more than one-third representation on the oversight board.

"There was always a concern about representation on the board, and the distribution of funds," said Steve Weikal, director of Oakland County's Office of Art, Culture and Film.

The current bill includes veto authority and mandates one-third of the revenues to go back to communities where the tax was generated.

"This is not considered as a substitute for public arts funding," said Anne Masterson, communications director of Detroit Renaissance, a private civic group established in the aftermath of the 1967 riots to promote the sharing of cultural interests in the metro area.

Detroit Renaissance has spearheaded the initiative to increase funding for cultural institutions. Masterson anticipates that the actual millage increase and subsequent allocation of funds to cultural institutions and arts groups is two years away.

This weekend's political-business pow-wow proves that there are unmistakable signs that the arts are no longer viewed as tangential to the regional economy, she said.

"Although there's nothing on the formal agenda (at the Mackinac Conference), there's the thinking that it's difficult to attract corporations to our area without a thriving culture."

Deep from page C1

ting-edge chic, the atmosphere at the Posner Gallery is the ideal setting for the breakthrough work of two artists who embody the unpretentiousness and depth of their paintings.

Equally impressive, however, is the attitudes of two painters who believe that growing older doesn't mean anything to do with approaching retirement.

Long after studying the intricacies of their paintings, the emotional resonance of Bernard and Febbo's work remains.

Unlike saccharin and trendy art, their work has depth derived from a lifetime of experiences.

Eight years in the making, Bernard continues to study his collage, "Granite Incantation," as it hangs on the wall in the Pos-

ner Gallery, he wonders where the passionate colors and weaving composition came from and what it reveals about himself.

He rubs his hand along the surface of the painting, struggling to find the words to describe the meaning.

Apparently, words are inadequate. What's more important for Bernard and Febbo is to constantly learn, question and search.

Two painters? Yeah, but they also seem like an excavator and traveler. And between them, a philosophy that runs deep.

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