

## **We Stood Up**

By Jessica Wyatt

Weston is a town full of rich history. Generations of families have grown here and helped develop the town of Weston to what it is today. Over the years, new families have settled here and the community has grown even more. On November 7, 2010, the people of Weston came together as one community in a peaceful protest against the members of the Westboro Baptist Church. It was in this memorable year that our town accomplished one community goal, a goal to draw attention away from one negative group and bring it back to where it belonged, a soldier who had died fighting for our country.

Sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class Charles M. Sadell passed away on October 24<sup>th</sup> of 2010 due to injuries sustained in Afghanistan. Members of Westboro Baptist Church had planned to protest the funeral, but the Weston community saw to it that the protest would not happen. Westboro had become infamous because of their protests of Military funerals. Fred Phelps, the leader of the Church, and his followers believe that God hates America and all of the people in it for allowing homosexuals to live. They truly believe that God is punishing all of us because of the homosexuals. The members of the Church believe that things such as the death of soldiers and violent acts are directly being controlled by God to punish everyone for condoning homosexual people, as well as the acceptance of other religions and races.

Despite Westboro's negative attention seeking intentions, the group was completely shut out that day back in 2010. The protestors had chosen the intersection of Highway 45 and Highway H as their location to protest Sergeant Sadell's funeral. Having heard about the protest prior to the funeral, members of our community began to organize a peaceful counter protest in support of the funeral and Sadell's family. People all over the community called each other to

begin planning. On the day of the funeral, members of our community gathered at the same intersection that Westboro was planning to be at, and stood directly in front of the Church members, blocking their hateful signs with a large American flag and signs of support. Hundreds of people from Weston, and people from several other states, effectively blocked out the members of the Westboro Baptist Church. Members of the Patriot Guard, a group of motorcycle riders who protect funerals from protests, also attended that morning. They drowned out the songs that the Church members were singing by revving their engines. After just a short period of time, the people of the Westboro Baptist Church left Weston, and Sadell's family never had to see any of them.

November 7<sup>th</sup> of 2010 marks a very important day for Weston as a community. Never had there been a community that had stood up to the Church in such an organized way. Not only did our community make a difference locally, but nationally. Weston's protest made national news. Local news stations broadcast the story, and within 24 hours the story had hit CNN. Hundreds and hundreds of letters and emails of thanks and support came pouring into Weston from all across the county. People from California, Texas, Georgia, and Washington, and multiple other states all sent their thanks to our community.

I would like to think that we're a pretty great community on our own, but just think about what would happen if every community, large or small, would stand up to Westboro the way that Weston did. Ultimately, we as a community effectively came together and took all of the attention that would have gone straight to Westboro, and turned it into support and thanks to a soldier who deserved it. Without attention, Westboro would be nothing. Recently, there have been more and more peaceful protests against Phelps and the rest of his Church, but at the root of all of them is our small and strong community that helped to start it all.