

# **Soldiers practice for Afghanistan at soccer site**

**By Ingrid Stegemoeller**

The Olympian (July 14, 2006)

A new road off 93rd Avenue Southwest provides more than access to the future Black Hills Community Soccer Complex. The project also is giving soldiers an opportunity to practice using heavy equipment in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan in the fall.

"The project is twofold," said Lt. Grayson Pranin of the 585th Engineer Company (Pipeline Construction). "We get to support the community that our soldiers live in, and we gain critical practice on skills that we will be using to build roads in Afghanistan."

The Fort Lewis platoon is the only active pipeline construction company in the country. The soldiers' specialty is building pipelines from ports inland, as deployed troops advance, Pranin said. They also operate heavy machinery needed to complete road-building and other projects.

It was activated 14 months ago and is still building troop levels.

"Because we're still a baby company, we haven't had a chance to do this kind of work yet. This project is a big training piece," Pranin said.

"It's going great," Pfc. Juan Lopez said. Lopez, who operated a roller flattening land for the road Thursday afternoon, said he was having fun pushing dirt around.

Though he is a fueller by training, meaning he is responsible for storing and distributing fuel throughout the unit, he is getting the chance to use different machines during the course of the project.

"The soldiers rotate and do cross-training" to gain experience with a range of machinery, Pranin said.

The platoon coordinated on the project with the nonprofit Black Hills Soccer Complex after soldiers had volunteered their time clearing trees from the property. The foundation contacted the platoon about helping with construction, Pranin said.

Sgt. Michael Hill spent Thursday afternoon operating a loader, picking up piles of dirt and depositing them in dump trucks.

"It gets us ready for our mission," Hill said of using a variety of equipment. "It gets everyone proficient for their jobs when we are deployed."

Hill, who had dirt smeared over his face, added, "We're workin' hard."

The project, in the works since February, received final approval July 6. They brought equipment down the next day and began work on Monday. The project is slated to last at least through the first week of August, Pranin said.