

Powerful speaker takes center stage

PRAYER BREAKFAST HOSTS 'WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN'

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World's Strongest Man Don Reinhoudt takes questions from the crowd at this month's prayer breakfast. Installation Chaplain Lt. Col. Stephen Pratel looks on.

These days 73-year-old Don Reinhoudt spends most of his time traveling as a spiritual motivational speaker.

He recently stopped at Fort Meade, wrapping up his three-day visit as the guest speaker at the Monthly Prayer Breakfast, hosted by the Religious Support Office, on Oct. 3.

The breakfast attracted an overflow crowd at Club Meade. Additional tables were set up to accommodate the surplus.

They were all there to hear from Reinhoudt, known as the world's strongest man from 1973 to 1980.

He won the International Powerlifting Federation's Super Heavyweight Championship four straight years, the only man ever to accomplish that feat. He was the first man to break the 2,400-pound total in powerlifting.

Reinhoudt would end up setting 61 records in his career, some of which he still retains.

Reinhoudt the Wimp

So what's a guy like — someone who once bench pressed a world-record 626 pounds? He's probably not what you'd expect. As he was introducing himself, Reinhoudt told the crowd he was a self-admitted wimp.

"I'm kind of an emotional guy," Reinhoudt said. "Big men aren't supposed to cry. Big men are supposed to be tough and mean or whatever. I guess, I'm a real weak person because when I work with kids, I tell them, a real man is a man that has feelings. A real man who cries because he cares. And a real man stands up for his commitments in his life and his country.

"And I'm that kind of guy. Yes I cry. I'm very emotional, I have feelings, and I was the strongest man in the world for seven years.

"But you know what? If that makes me a wimp by having emotions, by crying, having feelings, then I guess I win the award. Because I think that's so important for us, as men, to be able to say and stand up for what we feel inside."

Reinhoudt went on to talk about getting his start in sports. A self-described "below average student," he put his energy into athletics. Reinhoudt was an all-state athlete in New York in both football and shotput.

His high school achievements earned him a football scholarship to Parsons College in Iowa.

It was during his years at Parsons that Reinhoudt began lifting weights. He would also run into some trouble. During his sophomore year, Reinhoudt and some teammates went into town to celebrate a win.

"We're just having a good time. I'm drinking my Coca-Colas and Pepsis; the other guys were having a couple of brewskies," Reinhoudt recalled. "This townie came up to me looking for a fight.

"I was about 6 feet 3 inches, 260 pounds in college, and he came up to me and slugged me in the nose. He hit me for no reason."

Life Changer

Then came the event that Reinhoudt said changed his life.



Don Reinhoudt bending iron at the 1979 World's Strongest Man competition.

"I always had something inside me that came back to bite me as I got into college football. I had a little demon in me," he said. "Being picked on for so many years, I didn't care for that so much — nobody would.

"And so I had a little trouble with my temper — people picking on me, laughing at me, being called stupid, and this and that. But I always kept it inside me. I never let it show very much."

Reinhoudt didn't keep it inside that night.

"When he hit me, I body slammed him into a table," he said. "I broke the table and the guy's shoulder. I got arrested for assault and battery and got put in the jail for a day and [that] scared me to death.

"Of course, the guy that I hurt went to the hospital for two weeks, racked up a good medical bill, and I was arrested and had to go to court."

Caring Coach

Fortunately for the 19-year-old sophomore, enough witnesses came forward to testify that Reinhoudt didn't start the fight.

Reinhoudt credits that moment for changing his life.

"My coach took me under his wing when he realized the hurt that I had, the demon inside of me of being hurt, and we started going to church," he recalled. "I became a real strong Christian through that time I got in trouble.

"Other people helped me along the way. It took family, friends, dedicated people that believed in what I wanted to do, to help me. But the main ingredient was God."