

**By TOMMY BRYAN, *sports editor***

LEBANON -- What started out as just a meal for Cumberland's NAIA National Championship baseball team, turned into a lovefest Monday at Immanuel Baptist Church. Family members, city government officials and baseball alumni were on hand as the Lebanon Sports Commission put together a going away party of sorts for the 58-9 Bulldogs.

"We're a family, we love each other," said infielder Derrick Harwood. "That's what has made this a special team, a special group of guys. After tonight, a lot of us will be going our separate ways. But we'll always be a part of this family."

Cumberland coach Woody Hunt took the microphone briefly, thanking those in attendance and his, "brilliant, magnificent," team. "This was without question the most consistent team I've ever coached," Hunt said. "We never hit that lull, they always found a way to bounce back.

"They've taught me a few things this season, about team-building, growing together. Our defense wasn't quite what we wanted it to be, but our strengths, our pitching and hitting, more than made up for it."

Hunt harkened back to his 2004 World Series winners -- a team that dedicated the championship to all the former Bulldogs who never made it that far. "This year's championship is dedicated to our 2006 team that came so close (losing to host Lewis-Clark in the bottom of the 10th inning).

"We want to share this celebration with those guys. One play here or there, and we'd be celebrating our third championship tonight."

Hunt has already issued a challenge for his 2011 squad. "I want us to defend our title back in Lewiston next season," Hunt said, "if someone wants to win it, I want them to have to beat us to do it."