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Around area, veterans receive due respect

Ceremonies honor 'ordinary people' for service, sacrifice

By CATHERINE BAUM, SCOTT MERZBACH and REBECCA EVERETT
Staff Writers

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Residents in Easthampton, Amherst and Williamsburg recognized and remembered veterans Wednesday through gun salutes, patriotic performances and stories about ordinary people who have accomplished the extraordinary on behalf of our nation.

In Easthampton, Boy Scouts, veterans and local and state officials gathered for annual Veterans Day wreath-laying ceremonies at the Civil War monument in front of Old Town Hall, Brookside Cemetery and the World War I, World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War monuments in front of Emily Williston Memorial Library.

Dressed in clothing that ranged from military uniforms to sweatshirts and jeans, people took off their hats and placed their hands over their hearts as the trumpet soloist played taps. At the end of that tribute, some people hugged each other while others paid their respects at one of the four monuments in front of the library. A few people became tearful and wiped their eyes.

Boy Scouts Troop 205 Scout Master David Bernier said a third of his troop came out to honor retired and serving veterans. Bernier discussed the significance of Veterans Day with the 11- to 17-year-old boys at their troop meeting Tuesday night.

"Without them we couldn't be here," Bernier said of the service members. Troop members Eric Bernier and Joe Benigno, both 15, nodded their heads in agreement.

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GORDON DANIELS

At the Northampton Veterans Day Parade, Susanne and Glen Loud of South Road, Westhampton, drive a restored WW II Jeep. Both are Army veterans.



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The celebration continued at the American Legion Dalton Lavalley Post 224 on Pleasant Street, where State Rep. John Scibak, D-South Hadley, and State Sen. Michael Knapik, R-Westfield, spoke about the government's responsibility to provide services to veterans, among other topics.

The Easthampton Veterans Council presented two awards to Easthampton residents during the ceremony. Eric Snyder, 58, who is executive director of the Greater Easthampton Chamber of Commerce, received the Americanism award for his 35 years of service as a member of the Kiwanis club and 30 years as chairman of the fireworks committee, which puts on the annual show in Easthampton.

James Budd Finn, 81, received the Veteran of the Year award for his assistance to veterans and their families, his efforts decorating Easthampton's streets with American flags and his six years of service as chairman of the Veterans Council. At age 16, Finn joined the U.S. Navy in World War II. He has seen six tours as commander. A modest Finn thanked his family, comrades and shipmates upon receiving his award.

"You can't do this alone," Finn said. "It takes a lot of good people."

The Easthampton High School band played the National Anthem and Marches of the Armed Forces, and veterans in the Marines, Army, Coast Guard, Air Force and Navy stood when called for recognition.

James Subocz, a U.S. Navy veteran who fought in Operation Desert Storm, said the approximately 150 people who turned out for the event is one indication of how dedicated Easthampton is to its veterans. There are about 450 veterans in the post, which serves Easthampton, Florence and Westhampton, according to Subocz.

Amherst

More than 50 people gathered on the Town Common for the Veterans Day celebration in Amherst. They were asked to be demonstrative in recognition of those who have performed military service for their country.

"Fill a void, lend a hand, give a hug of appreciation," said Kathleen Pollard, the veterans agent for Amherst and principal organizer of the annual event.

Korean War veteran Robert Joy said it is good that so many came out to honor the veterans, especially this year when soldiers are still in Iraq, increasing numbers of troops are being killed and wounded in Afghanistan, and the recent Fort Hood attack that left 13 dead and 29 injured is a national tragedy.

"We just believed that due to all the events lately, we had to put a little extra effort into it," Joy said.

Terry Fenstad, commander of the American Legion Post 148, read a poem, "Veteran's Honor," which describes veterans as people who give the United States a blank check made payable "for an amount of 'up to and including my life.'"

"That is honor, and there are way too many people in this country who no longer understand it," the poem concludes.

As veterans held the American flag, as well as flags representing the Veterans of Foreign War and American Legion organizations, the event began with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Arthur Quinton then read Laurence Binyon's "For the Fallen," Willie Wheeler recited "Armistice" and Fenstad said a prayer for the Fort Hood victims.

At around 11 a.m., an F-15, flying out of Barnes Air National Guard Base in Westfield, flew over the common.

"It was perfect timing," Fenstad said.

The ceremony concluded with the American flag being slowly lowered from its half-staff position, and then quickly raised to meet the protocol, as Ryan Willey played bagpipes.

After the ceremony, a woman approached Fenstad with her late husband's American Legion hat, to which several medals from his service were attached. Fenstad said he was particularly touched by this act.

Williamsburg

Some 60 people gathered to watch the annual Veterans Day event at the Veterans Memorial on Main Street, including veterans, town officials, families and Girl Scouts.

After Joseph Russo, veterans agent for the district, welcomed everyone, the Rev. Goni of St. Mary's Church in Haydenville gave the invocation. Selectman David Mathers introduced Charles Adams, commander of the Haydenville American Legion, who gave the main address.

"Ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things - that's who veterans are," Adams said. "They are young and old, rich and poor, black and white and nearly every category in between."

Adams told the stories of three veterans, including Monica Brown, a young medic from Jackson, Texas who risked her life when she ran toward a burning Humvee under fire and pulled wounded soldiers from the vehicle. "But to credit the Monica Browns and the other brave heroes in our military with helping only their comrades is short-sighted. They are helping us," Adams said.

Adams, of Easthampton, served in the Army for 34 years.

Alan Estes, 56, of Mountain Street in Haydenville, thought Adams' theme of ordinary people doing extraordinary things was appropriate. "The military is partly made up of a small group of professionals, but it's the everyday people that step forward and do things," Estes said.

Estes, who served in the military during the Vietnam War, said his name was added to the Vietnam War section of the Veterans Memorial this past year.

After the address, James LeBeau, of the Williamsburg Veterans Memorial Committee, spoke about the progress of adding more names to the memorial, and thanked donors to the fund.

After a rifle salute and taps, the Rev. Werth Noyes of Williamsburg Congregational Church gave the closing benediction, including special mention of those affected by the Nov. 5 shooting at Fort Hood in Texas.

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