Keith Valley Students Honor Veterans with Annual Breakfast

For the past 15 years, Keith Valley Middle School has held their annual Veterans Breakfast as a way to say “thank you” and honor those who served their country. This year, the breakfast was held on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2019, and saw the highest attendance yet with over 400 veterans and their family members.

Patriotic balloons filled the cafeteria and handcrafted thank you cards decorated the tables. There was also memorabilia and photos from wars on display, as well as photos of veterans and details about their service.

The event opened with the Girl and Boy Scout color guard presenting the colors, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the Keith Valley Select Chorus singing the National Anthem.

Principal Jon Kircher and Assistant Principal John Ewerth welcomed attendees to the breakfast and thanked the men and women for their sacrifice and service. During a moment of silence, the audience was asked to recognize the POWs and MIAs. A round table in the center of the cafeteria was also dedicated to those missing from the ranks. To honor the military’s tradition, an eighth grade student lead the room in an invocation.

“Let us be reminded that we live the in the land of the free because of the brave,” he said in his blessing.

Once it was time to eat, student council members served breakfast to active duty and retired veterans along with their guests. Students and staff thanked veterans for their service while veterans shared their stories.

Merle Caples, a retired Marine from World War II, who just turned 97 years old on Nov. 1, was attending the breakfast with her daughter and grandson. She recalls joining the service as an easy decision and chose the Marines because she liked the hat. She remembers the Rosie the Riveter posters from the era and the slogan campaign to recruit females into the military: “Free a man to fight.”

“Everybody was joining the service,” said Caples. “I was young and healthy, and saw no reason why I shouldn’t join.”

Describing herself as a “country girl” from Kentucky, Caples was very excited to attend Camp Pendleton in California. She worked in the Post Exchange and any other position they needed to fill at the time.

“I made wonderful friendships,” said Caples. “But I’m the last one left.”

She served for over two-and-a-half years until the war ended in 1945, and was ready to start making a home with her husband and start having kids.

“It was something I will never forget. I am very proud to be a veteran,” said Caples.

Towards the conclusion of the event, PA State Representatives Thomas Murt and Todd Stephens, and Senator Maria Collett gave a few words to honor the veterans.

Murt highlighted that we must invest in our veterans. They return home struggling from addiction, homelessness and mental illnesses.

One homeless veteran on the street is one too many, which is why his office is collecting cold weather clothing items to donate to the homeless this winter.
Collette said this was her first time attending the breakfast at Keith Valley Middle School and was overwhelmed by the positive response of everyone in attendance.

“We honor you today and everyday here in our nation,” she stated.

Stephens stressed how important it is for the students to interact with veterans.

“Our young people have to understand the good, the bad and the ugly that comes with serving our country,” he said.

One of the ugly truths he shared is the statistic of losing 22 veterans to suicide per day.

“We owe them more,” he said, and stressed the critical investments that need to be made for mental health and treating PTSD so troops can return home with the dignity they deserve.

After the elected officials spoke, eighth grade student Nora Sweeney read her winning essay of the Patriot’s Pen, an essay contest run through the local VFW.

To wrap up the breakfast, Ewerth spoke about the importance of the POW/MIA table and what each item represented. Some of the items were a white table cloth to symbolize the purity of their intentions, an empty chair to symbolize that they are not here and a single red rose to represent the bloodshed. He encouraged veterans to take brochures about Veterans Affairs and benefits before they left.

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