

5/26/11

IN THE NEWS

Geriatric Authority veterans honored for service, sacrifice

HOLYOKE - Citing their sacrifices in the name of freedom, 25 military veterans from World War II through the Vietnam War were honored at a ceremony at the Geriatric Authority of Holyoke (GAH) on Thursday, May 26.

The veterans, all of whom either live at the GAH or participate in the facility's Adult Day Health Program, were on hand to receive citations and witness the unveiling of a Wall of Honor that included photos and memorabilia of their time in the service.

The ceremony was dignified, but not solemn, as the GAH veterans, some in wheelchairs, others with walkers sat in the first three rows in the front of the room. The honored veterans were touched and some were visibly moved by the proceedings.

Roland Laprade of Easthampton, a Navy veteran who served in the Pacific Theater during World War II and in the Korean War, said he was surprised to be honored after all of these years. He said he appreciated the recognition and effort put in by organizers to stage the event.

"I loved the whole thing," he said. "It was very well presented."

The veterans come from the communities of Holyoke, Chicopee, Easthampton and Granby.

In addition to Laprade, the honored veterans were Ellis Hillgrove, Theodore Rzewski, Leopold Jodoin, Edmund Czelusniak, James Turcotte, Edward Kamienski, Vern Comstock, Ramon Medina, Paul Mossey, Edward Ruszczyk, Kenneth Auger, Charles Paquette, Juan Morales, Gaston Roy, Stanley Kopeski, Edward Zebrowski, Earl Cathro, James Sears, William Judge, Gary Blanchard, David O'Connell, Jennings Rud, Ferdinand Stawarz, and Emil Krasler.

Larry White, a Vietnam veteran and resident of Springfield, organized the event with Jean Lajoie, director of the Adult Day Health Program and her staff, and served as master of ceremonies. He said America must never forget the contributions of these veterans no matter how long ago they served their country. White added that, although they have aged and their abilities to contribute have diminished over the years, it is important to thank and honor them for their past accomplishments.

"We are here to remember those individuals now sailing in the quiet stream of life who are no longer in the swift, flowing current of our modern world," he said.



Turkey Publications Submitted Photo

Sheryl Quinn, GAH executive director, and Larry White, who helped organize the event, honor local veterans.

Life program, presented the invocation. She reflected on the veterans' willingness to protect freedom through their military service.

"Let us take time to reflect on the ideals, principles, individual faiths and beliefs that governed the decisions and choices each of them made to wear the uniforms of the various branches of military service," Hyer said. "May we also remember Lord that it is only through such willingness to sacrifice for others, for individual personal goals, and for safety and comfort, that we are here now - free to share with them the honor and recognition they have more than earned and deserve from their service."

The highlight of the program was the handing out of certificates from the Holyoke VNA - Hospice Life Care "We-Honor Veterans" initiative and the posting of the names of each veteran on the Wall of Honor.

"We are not looking back," White said. "We are looking and we are seeing and we are doing what should be done. They are the reason we are gathered here today, to dedicate this honor roll to each of them on this Memorial Day weekend."

Sheryl Y. Quinn, GAH executive director, opened the festivities by welcoming the crowd and expressing the importance of the ceremony.

"We want to honor and thank these veterans for all they have done for our country," Quinn said. "These veterans without hesitation answered their country's call to service in her time of need. They and countless other servicemen and -women dedicated themselves to the preservation of freedom and liberty and we are forever grateful."

Following Quinn's remarks, a color guard from the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 11 of Western Massachusetts marched into the room as those in attendance who were able stood and saluted the flag. Ellen Couture sang the National Anthem, and Katie Stowkowski then led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance. Both are Adult Day Health Program employees.

Barbara Hyer, chaplain of the Holyoke VNA - Hospice