

'This memorial ... represents freedom'

MEMORIAL DAY continued from front page

W. Stromberg Jr.

The four granite pillars represent the major branches of the U.S. armed forces.

The Grand Ronde Honor Guard started the solemn day with its customary ceremonies at the Tribal Cemetery at 8 a.m. followed by ceremonies in Willamina at 9, Buck Hollow at 10 and Sheridan at 11. U.S. flags lined the two roadways flanking the Tribal Cemetery.

The main event began at noon with a ceremonial meal served in the Tribal Community Center. A lunch of ground elk gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans and salad was served by Nutrition Program Lead Cook Kevin Campbell, Food Sustainability Administrative Assistant Patricia LaClaire, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi, youth Madison Parker and Royalty members Iyana Holmes and Kaleigha Simi.

Approximately 100 people attended the lunch, which included members of McMinnville's American Legion Post 21 Riders handing out Vietnam War veteran lapel pins to anyone who served from Nov. 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975, regardless of location. About 25 pins were distributed.

The outdoors ceremony started at 1 p.m. with Steve Bobb Sr., chairman of the Tribe's Veterans Special Event Board and also a Marine Corps veteran from the Vietnam War era, giving the invocation and serving as master of ceremonies.

Bobb mentioned the fatal stabbing that occurred in Portland over the Memorial Day weekend in which two men were killed while defending two women from racial and religious taunts. Bobb called the two men heroes for defending what America is supposed to be about: freedom of religion and being free from persecution based on your race or beliefs.

Grand Ronde drummers led by Cultural Resources employees Brian Krehbiel and Bobby Mercier played a memorial song as the Grand Ronde Honor Guard brought in the colors with Alton Butler carrying the eagle staff, Raymond Petite the U.S. flag, Richard VanAtta the Grand Ronde Tribal flag, Kleffner the POW/MIA flag and Al Miller the Oregon flag.

Tribal youth JC Rogers sang the national anthem as she did in 2016 and Grand Ronde Royalty and Veterans Royalty – Kaleigha Simi, Isabelle Grout, Mabel Brisbois, Jameson Turner, Sophia Grout, Camas Gibbons, Kailiyah Krehbiel, Tasina Bluehorse, Hailey Lewis-Little, Iyana Holmes, Madison Aaron and Makenzie Aaron – performed "The Lord's Prayer" as sung by Aaron Neville.

Tribal Council members in attendance were Chairman Reyn



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Marie McCandless, a Polk County Veterans Service Officer, speaks during the Tribe's 15th annual Memorial Day Ceremony held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on Monday, May 29. Grand Ronde Honor Guard members, from left, Tribal Elders Alton Butler and Raymond Petite and Richard VanAtta carry in the eagle staff and flags to start the Tribe's 15th annual Memorial Day Ceremony.



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Leno, Kathleen George and Brenda Tuomi.

"I am so proud to be chairman of a Tribe that pays so much respect to our veterans," said Leno, who is a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran. "Steve and I are proud Marine Corps veterans. We only served a few miles away when we served our time in Vietnam. ... To me, this memorial, and any memorial whether it is small, big or whatever, it all represents freedom. And freedom is not necessarily easy to obtain. When we served in Vietnam, it was a very difficult time not only there, but when we came home. We fought for our country. We defend that flag and we knew that when we signed the bottom of the paper when we enlisted, we said we would give our lives for this country. A lot of people really don't realize it. But if you are a veteran and you have ever seen somebody pay that ultimate price, you will never forget it."

"I thank you for recognizing the sacrifices made by all of our veterans," George said. "We could not be more proud of them and proud of the heritage of Tribal people to always raise up their warriors and

remember to give them thanks because truly all of the sacrifices they have made have enabled us to live with the blessings that we live with today. I just want to offer my heartfelt thank you to all who have served and the families who had sacrifices as well when their people go off to serve."

Tuomi, who is an Army veteran, said Memorial Day is personal for her because she remembered being stationed at Fort Sill, Okla., during the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991. Her husband, Ron, was in the war zone when news of two U.S. pilots being shot down and captured was reported.

"To this day, I remember the absolute terror that went through my body," Tuomi said. "A few weeks earlier, my husband had left for the Gulf War. For the first time, I realized that there was no guarantee that he was coming home. ... Thankfully, the two pilots and my husband returned from the Gulf War. Unfortunately, far too many service men and women do not return from war. I would like to recognize and honor those who did not return, and also give a special recognition to their families, as their lives were changed forever. I want to say how thankful and grateful I am to all service members and to their families."

Speakers included Polk County Veterans Service Officer Marie McCandless, who served in the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, and NorthWest Senior and Disability

Services' Veterans Resource Navigator Niki Volz, who was raised in a Marine Corps family and attended officer candidate school for the Marine Corps.

McCandless told an emotional story about losing her "battle buddy," who stepped on a land mine's pressure plate while on a reconnaissance mission in Iraq.

"I cannot explain the emotions that crossed over me as I was told to load up the vehicle," she said. "I was told to get into one. Looking my best friend face to face, another soldier actually had to pick me up and throw me in a vehicle as we left. That day, David gave his life for his country and for me. I may have been lucky enough to come home with all of my limbs, but I still have scars, both physical and emotional."

Volz recounted the story of a high school friend whose husband lost his life while serving in the Marine Corps in Afghanistan.

"Their burden is also our burden, so let us help carry the weight because that is what family does," Volz said. "We support one another and we always have each other's back. It is our duty to always, always remember those who gave their lives to protect and maintain our ways of freedom and our ways of life."

Before Leno read the 10 names, Bobb read a letter from U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, who was unable to attend the ceremony because of his schedule in Washington, D.C.

The one-hour ceremony closed with Bud Abbott of the Willamina Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4211 reciting the poems "Remember Me, America" and "Freedom Is Not Free," and Robert Thornburg performed taps on the trumpet as the colors were retired.

The West Valley Veterans Memorial, which was dedicated in 2003, was designed by Bobb and features a man and a woman dressed in traditional Native clothing standing side by side reaching to the sky. Surrounding them are four black granite pillars, which feature the names of Tribal and community veterans from Grand Ronde, Willamina and Sheridan.

The Memorial Day ceremony was recorded by the Tribe's Information Systems employees Wendell Olson and Braden Ebensteiner and can be viewed in its entirety at www.grandronde.org by clicking on the News tab and then Video. ■