

Breakfast brings veterans together at elementary school

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Veterans and their families munched on bagels, donuts, fruit, and hard-boiled eggs in local-farm hues of green, blue, and brown. Many wore military gear, or jackets and caps celebrating their service, labeled with the branch in which they served.

They drank coffee and talked in the Sisters Elementary School gym, hosted by fourth-grade leadership students and the Sisters Parent-Teacher Community group (SPTC).

Bill Phillips described himself as active from 1965 to 1969, when he was in the Army Airborne Special Forces and First Cavalry Division.

“He was a heavy-hitter in Vietnam,” said his son Adam Toney, a sergeant in the Oregon National Guard and father to students at SES.

Said Phillips of his military experience, “Well, when I first went into the service I was a nice, clean-cut Mormon boy from Utah.” Serving in the Army “gave me a better outlook on life... I met a lot of nice people, lost a lot of nice people. It was awakening.”

The war made him appreciate life, “more than anything. We appreciate that we didn’t die over there,” he said of veterans like himself. “We’re all brothers and sisters.”

Toney served in Afghanistan in 2006, and was a Special Forces liaison in Iraq, 2010–2011.

“I had a pretty positive experience in the military,” he said, though he lost friends, “mostly to accidents afterward, but also there.”

He said he was a “troublemaker” before he enlisted; Phillips used the word “ruffian.” Toney said that since he first entered service in 2003, “There’s a lot of things that can raise the hair on my neck.”

He described seeing both the positive and negative

effects of military intervention on the ground in the Middle East.

“Seems like politics gets in the way of doing what’s right,” he said.

John Ferguson is a local veteran who attended the breakfast. He served in the Air Force.

“I was an E-4, which was a sergeant in the Air Force back then,” he said. “I was in for a commitment for six years, October 1967 through June 1973, and two years for active reserves. It was during the Vietnam War, but I was lucky. I served at Naha Air Base in Okinawa in support of the war.”

The experience of entering the military made him grow up fast.

“You come out of high school after being taken care of your whole life, you get into boot camp and you’re



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Leadership students at Sisters Elementary School served a continental breakfast buffet to veterans at an event presented by SPTC.

on your own,” Ferguson said. “It’s kind of instant maturity.”

Local veteran Earl Schroeder said, “It was with great delight that the school district office put up new flags for Veterans Day.”

The old ones had been

looking worn. Who provided the flags? Schroeder gave a wink and said not to tell.

Leila Jarvis, a fourth-grader in the school’s leadership program, stood proudly beside the buffet table.

“I made sure all the veterans knew what they were doing, and I helped set the bagels up,” she said.

“My grandpa worked in the military, in the Air Force,” she said. “I just felt like I really wanted to do this.”

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