'I would like to thank you for your service'

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Charles Neujahr, Public Affairs/Publications Administrative Assistant Chelsea Clark, Tribal Council Administrative Assistant Shannon Simi and Tribal Royalty princesses served an elk stew meal to more than 160 people in the Tribal Community Center.

Veterans Special Event Board Chairman Steve Bobb Sr., a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran, was master of ceremonies and he started the event with an invocation.

Tribal Elder Jolanda Catabay sang the national anthem and the Royalty princesses performed "The Lord's Prayer" in sign language before the colors were traditionally drummed in by Bobby Mercier, Jacob Holmes, Kai Kanim Mercier, Travis Stewart and Brian Krehbiel. Alton Butler then carried in the American flag, Raymond Petite carried in the Tribal flag, Mike Lane carried in the POW/MIA flag and Albert Miller carried in the Oregon flag.

Bobb introduced each Grand Ronde Tribal Council member present and each addressed the gathering.

"I would like to thank everyone for coming today and I would like to honor our soldiers who are serving – the ones who have served in the past and the ones who have never come home," said Tribal Council member Denise Harvey.

Harvey read the poem "The Unknown Soldier." "I would like to thank you for your service," she added.

Harvey said she hoped visitors to Grand Ronde felt welcome and that they would return for events like the Marcellus Norwest Memorial Veterans Powwow in July and the larger contest powwow in August.

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier recalled how he met Bobb for the first time and how that meeting changed his outlook on veterans.

"When I started working for the Tribe and started working with a lot more veterans, especially while serving on Tribal Council, I developed a much deeper appreciation for what you guys have done for this country and some of the sacrifices you have made for people," Mercier said. "I think it is important that we take the time every year, especially on this day, to honor you guys for what you have done. My heart goes out to you."

Mercier recognized past Tribal Council members in the crowd who are veterans that he had worked with – June Sherer, Wink Soderberg, Wesley "Buddy" West and Jan Reibach.

"I've learned more about veterans from these people than any other people in my life," said Mercier.

Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy said she comes from a family of veterans who have served.

"It is always a pleasure for me to come and to give honor to those that served our country and served our people," said Kennedy. "You know I think about the courage it took to step forward and to step out and to say, 'I will serve, I will defend, I will protect,' and that is what enables us to do our work here. This day is here to celebrate and to honor our veterans and remember to always remember what this country is about – it's about liberties and freedom."

Tribal Council Vice Chairman Jack Giffen, Jr. said the event made him think of an earlier time in Grand Ronde.

"Sitting back there brought back memories of before we had this beautiful memorial," said Giffen. "We had our cemetery down there and the gathering was just a few Tribal members and family members coming back to honor those veterans that gave their life for the freedoms we have. We want to take a moment and thank all the veterans for your commitment to this great country we live in and for the freedoms that we enjoy. I give you the highest honor I can give you."

Bobb introduced Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno as not only a fellow Marine, but also a Vietnam veteran as well.

Leno asked all veterans stand and be acknowledged with applause.

"We need to recognize why we are here today," said Leno. "In 13 years since we put this memorial up it's amazing to think how many of our veterans used to be here with us and now they have passed on and they are not here with us, but we are still recognizing those people. This is one of my favorite ceremonies we do every year."

Leno said all wars are "horrible," but he wanted to acknowledge his fellow Vietnam War veterans for what they brought back with them. He also said he wanted to remember his cousin Tom Leno who passed away on New Year's Eve.

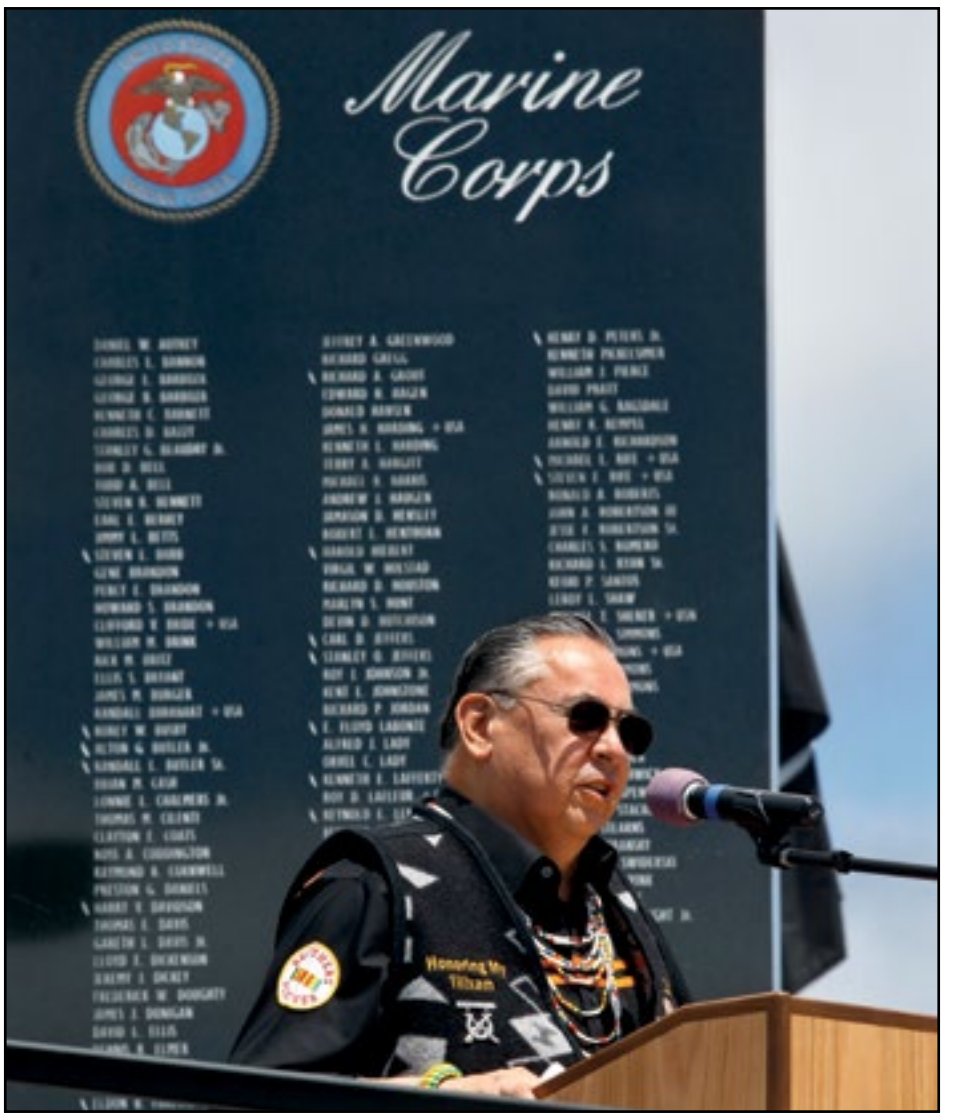
"We live with it every day," said Leno.

Yamhill County Veterans' Service Officer Jerry Wilson said his affinity for the culture of veterans came while serving 30 years in the Air Force. He said coming to Grand Ronde is one of his favorite stops each Memorial Day.

Wilson said much of his job is working with veterans who need a variety of help and that he calls on many resources to help them get what they need.

"I rely a lot on service organizations to step in and help me," said Wilson. "When I call, they always respond. The people who respond are the veterans themselves so

Photos by Michelle Alaimo



Junior Veterans Queen Amelia Mooney gives Army veteran Bruce Carl a lapel pin after his name was read during the 13th annual Memorial Day Ceremony held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus on Monday, May 25. Carl was one of the 31 names added to the memorial this year. At left, Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran, speaks during the 13th annual Memorial Day Ceremony.

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