

‘We must honor our fallen heroes’

MEMORIAL DAY
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Army veteran, attended and spoke briefly.

“This is truly a time of remembrance,” Kennedy said. “The Tribe has had many different men and women who have entered the armed forces, some did not come back home. ... The main thing is that we know the courage these young men and women had. ... When we look at our veterans, they don’t always talk about what happened; many of their scars are internal.”

Tuomi said she was grateful for the opportunity to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and noted that more than 600,000 soldiers had given their lives in various conflicts since World War I.

Mercier said he always feels honored and inadequate when asked to speak at the Memorial Day event.

“I did not serve, but serving on Tribal Council has given me insight on veterans and for the younger generation, talk to veterans when you think life is tough because you could be in a rice paddy in Vietnam seeing (awful) things,” Mercier said.

He mentioned past and current Tribal Council members in attendance who had served in the military, including Bobb, Reyn Leno, Tuomi and Navy veteran Wink Soderberg.

“I would urge people to get to know their veterans,” he said. “I thank all of you for making this enormous sacrifice. We can never repay this debt, but this is an opportunity to say thanks.”

Also in attendance were Tribal Elder and past Tribal Council Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison and Yamhill County Commissioner Stan Primozich.

The Grand Ronde Honor Guard posted the colors and speakers included Mitch Sparks, acting director of the Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs, and Wayne Crowder of Polk County Battle Buddies, a group that meets to help counsel veterans.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Wayne Crowder of Polk County Battle Buddies speaks during the 16th annual Memorial Day observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus on Monday, May 28.

Sparks is a Navy veteran and served 26 years.

“It’s an honor to be here among veterans and families on the 150th anniversary of the first Memorial Day,” he said. “Many of you are here to remember an individual who impacted your life. ... We must honor our fallen heroes. Their memory inspires us to be better.”

Crowder talked about his father, who served in World War II and

returned with lifelong internal trauma. Crowder joined the Army at age 18 in 1968 and served in Vietnam. Father and son never discussed their service. After years of struggling, Crowder formed Polk

County Battle Buddies as a way to give young veterans returning from war an opportunity to connect.

“We can honor our fallen by how we treat our living,” he said.

Names added to the West Valley Veterans Memorial this year are Navy veteran and Tribal member Dana D. Stephens; Air Force veterans Maurice C. Yoder, Alton B. Weiss, Gary Holman and William L. McMahon; Army veterans Roy H. Tucker, Raymond H. Tucker, Johnny Morales, William F. Barrett and Dustin L. Conde; and Marine Corps veterans and Tribal member James E. Turner, Daniel W. Helfrich and Troy J. Harris.

Turner said it was an honor to have his name added to the Marine Corps pillar.

“And I love coming to this event every year,” he said. “It is very much appreciated.”

Leno, a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran and former Tribal Council chairman, read the names.

The addition of 13 names brings the number of veterans honored on the pillars to 2,348.

The ceremony closed with Bud Abbott reciting the poems “Remember Me, America” and “Freedom is Not Free,” and Robert Thornburg performing taps on the trumpet.

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. ■

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Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy speaks during the 16th annual Memorial Day observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial.

Grand Ronde Honor Guard member, Army veteran and Tribal Elder Raymond Petite posts the Grand Ronde Tribal flag at the beginning of the 16th annual Memorial Day Observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus on Monday, May 28.

