

‘Today we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice’

MEMORIAL DAY
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The event began at noon with a meal of turkey gravy, potatoes, green beans, rolls, salad, cake and cupcakes served by Veterans Royalty, Grand Ronde Royalty and their parents to approximately 100 attendees in the nearby Tribal Community Center.

The outdoors ceremony began at 1 p.m. under a cloudy, breezy sky with Grand Ronde drummers playing a memorial song led by Tribal member Brian Krehbiel and Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier.

Tribal member JC Rogers sang the national anthem as she did the past three years. It was a whirlwind weekend for the young singer, who graduated Saturday afternoon from Willamina High School and then spent the weekend on a senior trip. After she sang, Grand Ronde Royalty and Veterans Royalty performed “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, Vice Chair Chris Mercier and Tribal Council members Denise Harvey, Kathleen George, Lisa Leno and Jack Giffen Jr. attended. This year, Tribal Council opted for a change from previous Memorial Day ceremonies and chose not to deliver speeches, instead wanting the focus to be on those who were being honored for making the ultimate sacrifice.

Also in attendance was Tribal Elder and past Tribal Council Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison, who sat in the front row.

The Grand Ronde Honor Guard posted the colors and speakers included Polk County Veteran Services Officer Eric Enderle and Director of Statewide Veterans Services Sheronne Blasi.

Enderle, an Army veteran who was medically retired after being wounded during a deployment to Iraq, talked about the history behind Memorial Day.

Originally known as Decoration Day, it began after the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. Many observe the day by visiting cemeteries or memorials.

“One of the things that has al-



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

Veterans Honor Guard member and Marine Corps veteran Alton Butler carries the eagle staff and Veterans Special Event Board Chairman Raymond Petite carries the American flag at the start of the 17th annual Memorial Day ceremony held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on Monday, May 27. Fifteen names were added to the memorial this year.



ways been interesting to me is the complaint that people don’t understand the importance of Memorial Day,” he said. “In 1923, complaints were made that those born after the Civil War didn’t understand the sacrifices veterans had made. ... Sometimes, we overthink it. Today

is a day to honor what veterans did and it’s also a day to remember those made the ultimate sacrifice, and those who continue to battle back home after serving our great nation.”

Blasi, a 14-year Navy veteran, said she is always struck by the powerful emotions Memorial Day invokes.

“Today we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice,” she said. “It is this holiday that speaks most keenly to our highest and best ideals.”

She also noted that as a demographic group, Native Americans join the military in large numbers

percentage-wise. “Historically, you have the highest record of serving our country,” Blasi said. “The warrior tradition is exemplified by honor, pride and devotion. ... Many of the names added here today represent the loss of a loved one. We remember and honor their sacrifices.”

Names added to the West Valley Veterans Memorial this year were Air Force veterans Jeremy Fillible and Charles Cinnamon; Army veterans and Tribal members Mitchell Spohn and David Kurns II, and James E. Black Jr., James E. Black, Gordon Calder Jr. and Edwin Roten; Marine Corps veterans and Tribal member Rodney Smith and Mark Dolan; and Navy veterans and Tribal member Lonnie Riddle and Donald Marten, Ralph Fillible, Walter Van Orden and Mark Carl.

Van Orden’s daughter, Annette Wright and her husband, Pickett, drove from North Carolina to witness her father’s name being added to the list. He was a World War II Navy veteran who served in the South Pacific.

“Last year we were in town visiting relatives and saw this memorial,” she said. “I called Steve Bobb and found out my grandfather was on the list, so we talked about what it would take to add my dad, and that’s why we’re here now.”

Added Pickett, “Steve was super helpful and showed us his amazing work.”

Former Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, a Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran, read the names.

The addition of 15 names brings the number of veterans honored on the pillars to 2,362.

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. ■



Tribal member JC Rogers sings the national anthem during the 17th annual Memorial Day ceremony held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on Monday, May 27. Fifteen names were added to the memorial this year.



Annette Wright touches the pillar where her grandfather, Walter L. Van Orden, is enshrined on the West Valley Veterans Memorial during the 17th annual Memorial Day ceremony held on Monday, May 27. Wright, along with her husband Pickett Wright, traveled from Edenton, N.C., to participate as her father, Walter Van Orden, was one of 15 new names added to the memorial.