



Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**Grand Ronde Honor Guard members, from left, Alton Butler, Rich VanAtta and Ramona Quenelle wait to post the colors during the Memorial Day celebration held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on Monday, May 30.**

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## Number of veterans honored on the pillars is 2,378

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is past chairman of the Tribe's Veterans Special Event Board and a Marine Corps veteran from the Vietnam War era, gave the invocation and served as master of ceremonies.

Bobb introduced Tribal Council members in attendance, which included Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy, Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Michael Cherry, Kathleen George, Lisa Leno, Denise Harvey and Jack Giffen Jr.

"It's important for me to note at these events that I am not a veteran and the closest I got to combat was going to the Civil War (football) game and dealing with Beaver

fans," Mercier said to chuckles in the audience.

"I met Steve 20 years ago when I worked at Smoke Signals and then when I was elected to Tribal Council, I served with many veterans. Every story is different, but I have learned more about veterans from Steve than probably anyone else. He also brought up Ukraine in his prayer. My cousin lives there and he cannot leave. He is required to stay and fight, and worries about his home being bombed. Think about that. We will never have to worry about that because of all of our veterans. ... We're stable. No one would be foolish enough to invade our country. Today it is about honoring those people who made it

possible. I can never repay you."

George said she raised her hands to all the soldiers who had gathered at the event.

"Today is an important day and it's a somber day to remember these men and women who sacrificed everything," she said.

The event began at noon with a boxed lunch served to attendees at the Tribal Community Center by Veterans Royalty.

The ceremony began at 1 p.m. under cloudy and sometimes stormy skies with Grand Ronde drummers playing a memorial song led by Tribal members Anthony Quenelle, Nakoia Mercier and Jordan Mercier, followed by the Grand Ronde Honor Guard, led by Tribal Elder Alton Butler, carrying in the colors.

Tribal member JC Rogers sang the national anthem as she has for the past five events. After she sang, Veterans Royalty and Grand Ronde Royalty members performed "The Lord's Prayer."

The keynote speaker was retired Marine Corps Sgt. Major Rod Beach, who also worked for 31 years for the Oregon State Police.

"I'm very honored to speak with you today," he said. "It's one of those things that I can't tell you how proud I am to address fellow veterans and our families. The biggest thing we can do is acknowledge the sacrifices our veterans and their families

made. ... It is also important to acknowledge public safety people who have died in the line of duty."

The ceremony closed with Tribal Elder and Air Force veteran Jerry George reciting the poems "Remember Me, America" and "Freedom Is Not Free."

Names added to the West Valley Veterans Memorial for 2022 are Air Force veterans Henry Edwin Sjogren and Chester Dale Bowyer, Navy veteran William Albert Hulling and Army veteran Larry Eugene Darling, who is the sole Tribal member being honored this year.

The addition of four names brings the number of veterans honored on the pillars to 2,378.

After the reading of names, Vietnam-era Navy veteran Bryan Shirley performed taps on his 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.

An event has been held every Memorial Day at the site except for in 2020 when the burgeoning COVID-19 pandemic forced it to be canceled. ■



**Marine Corps veteran Rod Beach delivers the keynote address during the Memorial Day ceremony on Monday, May 30.**