

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion



OREGON'S VETERANS CONTINUE TO SERVE

Veterans' Day is one day to honor the service and sacrifice of all who have raised their right hand, worn the uniform, defended our freedom and stood guard over our peace.

Across our 70 year history, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs has witnessed generations of service members returning home and then using their hard-earned leadership skills and experience to significantly contribute to our communities.

What many citizens may not know is that one out of every 12 Oregonians is a veteran. While our veterans gain great strength from their service, it is not surprising that many can face challenges as they reintegrate home. For those impacted by their service, we must understand their tenacious spirit and resiliency. They deserve nothing less than the best in care, resources and support.

There is never a doubt, though, that our learned resilience, idealistic pride and unwavering dedication to our families, community and each other is stronger because we served in uniform.

Take the recent examples of young returning veterans from Oregon like Alek Skarlatos and Chris Mintz. Alek captured international headlines for thwarting a terrorist attack while travelling in France after his deployment in Afghanistan with the Oregon Army National Guard.

Similarly, Chris Mintz, an Army veteran, also chose to run toward chaos on the Umpqua Community College campus to help protect fellow students. He was shot multiple times and thankfully continues to recover for his young family and community.

These stories have made the national news, but our local veterans' community is filled

GUEST VIEWPOINT

BY CAMERON SMITH
DIRECTOR, OREGON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

with everyday examples of inspiring continued service. Bill Griffith is a former Navy Corpsman who served in Vietnam and is continuing to serve his fellow veterans as an award-winning volunteer Long Term Care Ombudsman. He was recently recognized for his advocacy for our aging veterans at the Oregon Veterans' Home in The Dalles and other skilled nursing facilities, receiving the Governor's Volunteer Award in October.

A recent appointment to ODVA's Advisory Committee, Kim Douthit, is a Coast Guard veteran and continues to serve student veterans in her role as a veterans' coordinator at Portland Community College. She is a leader for both our fastest growing demographic, women veterans, and for all veterans across Oregon.

While our focus is on our veterans, we also must remember the service and sacrifice of

our military and veteran families. Judi Van Cleave of Portland was elected as the National President of Gold Star Wives of America. Her late husband was a disabled Korean War veteran. Judi's significant service for two decades with Gold Star Wives of America continues to honor our fallen and their families.

Across our team at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, many of us are veterans and family members, and we continue to be inspired by our current service members, veterans and their families. We are honored and privileged to serve them — not just on Veterans' Day, but throughout the year. It is their individual stories that make up the incredible fabric of our community.

No matter the branch of

service, no matter the era, no matter who we are or where we live, we stand proudly together.

We are Oregon veterans.

Cameron Smith served three tours in Iraq as a U.S. Marine captain and is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

LETTERS POLICY

Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed.

All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity.

Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published. All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

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