

VETERANS

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That was the time — the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month — when the armistice took effect ending the four years of then-unprecedented bloodshed in the trenches.

Pierce, a retired Army first sergeant and member of the American Legion Post No. 41 in Baker City, told the audience that another holiday, Memorial Day, is set aside to honor those who have died defending America.

Veterans Day recognizes not only the fallen, but all those who have served in the country's military.

"The branch of service doesn't matter," Pierce said. "The length of service doesn't matter. The job they did doesn't matter. What matters is that we all understand that they wrote a blank check to our country up to and including the possibility of their own death."

Pierce noted that all veterans "paid something," and that many returned from their service with scars that aren't always visible.

He talked about the "insidious malady" of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Department of Veterans Affairs and many others, which help veterans "inflicted with this lasting wound."

"We must remember them, appreciate them, and tell them, God bless you for your support."

Loren Ingalls, chaplain at the Veterans of Foreign Wars



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Duncan Pierce gives the Veterans Day address Thursday morning, Nov. 11, at the Baker County Courthouse beside the memorial to local residents who perished in war.

in Baker City, read a prayer in honor of veterans.

Jessica Keys, Eastern Oregon field representative for U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, read a letter from the senator.

"We owe a debt to our veterans, but also to their families and friends who awaited their return from service and supported them during and after their time in uniform," Merkley wrote. "Military families are strong and resilient, and along with Oregonians everywhere, I thank them for helping their loved ones to serve their country."

"Let this Veterans Day serve as a humble reminder to honor all who served in our Armed Forces and to live up to the ideals for which they served and sacrificed: Freedom. Justice. Equality."

Helping veterans a 'dream job'

By JAYSON JACOBY

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Rick Gloria helped bring about \$24.5 million into Baker County last year but it's not dollars that bring him the most satisfaction.

It's the people who benefited from his efforts.

That money went to some of Baker County's heroes — men and women who served in America's military — in the form of direct disability or pension payments, and for medical services.

As Baker County's veteran services officer for the past seven years, Gloria finds his work immensely gratifying.

"I tell my wife, I found my dream job," Gloria told Oregon state Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, during a meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 9, two days before Veterans Day, in Gloria's office in the Baker County Courthouse.

Owens, whose legislative district includes Baker County, was in Baker City for a town hall meeting with the county's other state legislator, Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale.

Prior to the town hall, Owen toured the building at 2200 Fourth St. that the county bought in 2020 to house the Baker County Health Department.

Gloria, who is himself a veteran, serving 22 years on active duty with the Oregon National Guard before retiring as a lieutenant colonel,

will also be moving into the building, probably within a few months.

Although Gloria beams with pride as he shows Owens a series of spreadsheets documenting the variety of federal benefits that Baker County veterans receive, he's not satisfied.

He counts among his clients about 1,450 county residents.

But Gloria said there are likely more than 2,000 veterans living in the county — about 12% of the county's population — and he wants to ensure that they all receive the benefits to which they're entitled.

"My goal is to get everybody under my management," he said — meaning they have at least filed claims for potential benefits. "That's great," Owens told Gloria. "Thanks for your work."

For the federal fiscal year 2020, which ended Sept. 30, 2020, benefits to Baker County veterans totaled \$24,451,000, an increase of almost \$2.6 million from the previous year, Gloria said.

That amount included:

- \$12,710,000 in disability and pension payments.
- \$11,255,000 in medical services.

Gloria said his chief task, besides encouraging veterans to contact him, is to help those veterans navigate the sometimes confounding labyrinth of paperwork in the federal Veterans Affairs system.

The federal government aids military veterans and their qualifying spouses with multiple needs, including medical, disability payments and pensions, higher education and burial benefits.

But within each of those categories, Gloria said, the criteria that determine whether a veteran is eligible, and if so for how much money, can be confusing.

To qualify for a pension, for instance, a veteran must be at least 65, or have a permanent and total disability, and have served during one of these wartime periods:

- World War II — Dec. 7, 1941, through Dec. 31, 1946
- Korea — June 27, 1950, through Jan. 31, 1955
- Vietnam — Aug. 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975
- Gulf War/Iraq/Afghanistan — Aug. 2, 1990, through the present

Eligibility for disability payments and medical coverage isn't as straightforward, Gloria said.

The amount of compensation depends largely on whether a veteran's disability resulted from his or her military service.

And Veterans Affairs determines the "service-connected" level in 10% increments.

For instance, a veteran whose medical condition is 30% service-connected would receive less compensation than a veteran whose condition is 80% service-connected.

Citing a recent example, Gloria told Owens about a local Air Force veteran

who worked as a jet engine mechanic.

The veteran had hearing loss due to his work with the loud engines, and Gloria filed a claim on his behalf. The veteran qualified for monthly disability payments and for free hearing aids.

When Owens asked Gloria if there were any benefits he would like to provide veterans that he can't now, Gloria's answer was quick and succinct.

"Dental." Gloria said most veterans don't qualify for dental insurance. The exception is veterans whose medical condition is 100% service-connected, he said.

Gloria told Owens that there are proposals in the Veterans Affairs to expand dental coverage for veterans, something he wholeheartedly endorses.

"There's a lot of need for dental services," he said.

Gloria told Owens that one of his most important steps since taking the Baker County job was to go through the process — which he said was more thorough than obtaining a top secret clearance — to have access to the Veterans Affairs online claims system.

That system allows Gloria to see, in real time, the status of any claim that he has filed on behalf of a veteran.

Gloria said he can meet with veterans in person in his office, or over the phone.

He encourages all veterans to call him at 541-523-8223 to discuss their potential eligibility for benefits.

BORDER

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He said seven other counties have passed similar measures supporting the concept.

He said he is working with residents in Morrow, Josephine and Curry counties to put the issue on the ballot there as well.

McCarter said state Sen. Lynn Findley, the Vale Republican whose district includes Baker County, has endorsed the concept and would like county commissioners to write a letter to him.

"What we are asking the counties to do is not for you to speak out and say 'we are in favor of this' or 'we're against this' or anything else, but a letter to Senator Findley saying basically 'the people of our

county have voted in favor of this issue and we would like you to take it to the state legislature,'" McCarter said.

McCarter said his other goal is to have the Idaho and Oregon legislatures begin discussing the issue.

He noted that actually moving state borders would require approval from both state legislatures and from Congress.

"It's a complicated process that requires both legislatures to come into an agreement to form a compact and then it goes to the US Congress for approval," McCarter said. "We believe that it would be passed in the US Congress because it's not really changing the makeup; it's not adding any more senators, it might be shifting one US representative which would be representative



Ryan Brennecke/The (Bend) Bulletin, File

Mike McCarter of LaPine, in Deschutes County, is the president of Move Oregon's Border.

Bentz to an Idaho representative position."

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey asked which Oregon counties have passed measures related to the Greater Idaho proposal.

McCarter said voters in Union and Jefferson counties approved measures in

November 2020, followed by five counties — Baker, Grant, Lake, Malheur and Sherman — in May 2021.

Harney County became the eighth county with its measure last week.

Commissioner Bruce Nichols told McCarter that he has spoken with people in Idaho

who oppose their state adding more than a dozen Oregon counties.

"I've also talked to some people that moved away from Idaho to Oregon because they like the building codes better," Nichols said. "Idaho's building codes are much more lax than Oregon's are."

He said he's heard complaints about how the less stringent codes mean house buyers need to be "very careful."

"Those kind of issues are going to take a tremendous amount of discussion between two states," Nichols said. "And all that stuff I think is really good to ferret out so all of the people know what they are getting into if they go down that path."

Other business

- Commissioners ap-

proved an agreement with Elkhorn Taxi to use state transportation money to subsidize the cost of taxi rides to and from work for local residents.

"A person would get a punch card, pay two dollars, we pick up the rest as part of the grant to help people that can't get to work, get there. It's been very successful so far," said Doni Bruland, who works for the county.

• Commissioners approved the upgrading of electrical service to RV camping sites at the county's Hewitt Park near Richland. Workers will install new electric connections with 50-, 30- and 20-amp circuits.

The county will also install water lines to bring drinking water from Richland to Hewitt Park, which is on the shore of Brownlee Reservoir.

BLOOD

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Red Cross officials had been a bit concerned about adding the second day — most Baker City drives are one-day events — but a flurry of late donors filled most of the available appointments on Tuesday, Evans said.

"People have really stepped up," she said.

Evans said the Red Cross has had more people express an interest in donating blood during the pandemic, as residents seek to do something to help during difficult times.

"We've taken in more units this year than we did last year," Evans said. "Especially with this drive, this one is a big one."

Jake Reines, a Red Cross representative, said the

organization will consider scheduling more two-day blood drives in Baker City.

"We have a lot of donors that are interested in donating but not a lot of opportunities," Reines said. "So, it's something we're checking into."

The Red Cross also added one-day drives in October at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Baker City, and at Baker High School.

"There are more opportunities for donors in Baker," Reines said.

Among the donors, Randy Estes said he read an article about the Red Cross having many appointments for Tuesday's drive.

He said he had donated blood in the past and decided to do so again on Tuesday.

Dan Lyon said he decided to start donating with this

week's event.

"I think it's a good idea, I think everybody should do it," Lyon said.

Robin Harrington said she knows the Red Cross always has a great demand for blood.

"I just wanted to be able to do my part," Harrington said.

Tamera Pierce said she donates regularly.

"I'm glad I can help somewhat," Pierce said.

Reines said he felt great about the two-day drive, with support from donors and businesses.

Baker City blood drives for 2022 are scheduled for Jan. 24, April 4, June 13, Sept. 12 and Nov. 14.

Evans said the Jan. 24, 2022, drive is scheduled for one day, but it's possible the Red Cross will add a second day.



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

Dan Lyon donated blood on Tuesday, Nov. 9 in Baker City.

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