

BIEREN:

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ate medical care but died before he could be medically evacuated.

Saturday's service was packed with Bieren's family and friends, some of whom got up at the end of the service to share memories about him.

Tracy Finck, Bieren's mother, recalled her close relationship with her son.

"Austin and I talked all the time," she said. "If he was down, I'd send him quotes. I just wanted to make sure he was happy."

Finck read out a list of the medals and honors her son received during his service, and spoke about how proud he was to serve in the military.

"He was an amazing young man," she said. "He always put his best foot forward. I can't be prouder of who he was or who he became."



Austin Bieren's grandmother speaks about him during the airman's memorial service Saturday at Umatilla High School.

Mike Mosher, Bieren's high school football coach, spoke about his for-

mer student and friend's competitive nature and mischievous personality.

"As you got to know him, he opened up," Mosher said. "And once

he trusted you, he'd do anything for you — but you had to earn his trust."

Mosher said Bieren had considered playing college football, but recalled when he told his coach that he'd changed his mind.

"He said he wanted to be part of something greater than himself, something elite," Mosher said. "That's who he was."

Bieren's grandmother also spoke at the service, noting that the last time she spoke to her grandson, he asked her to pray for him.

"If I live to be 100, nothing will ever make me happier than that," she said.

Other family members and friends spoke about fun times they'd had with Bieren, and most mentioned his penchant for mischief when he was younger.

One friend that grew up with Bieren recalled with a laugh the time they

torched a bale of hay with fireworks — but all noted how responsible Bieren grew up to be.

"I got to see a troublemaker turn into a hero, and I couldn't ask for a better friend," she said.

Bieren's family also put together a slide show, which showcased Bieren's happy times. The slide show highlighted Bieren's love of sports, his adoration of his nephew Jaren, whom his mother called "his pride and joy," and his love for his wife, Rachel.

At the end of the ceremony, Cameron Smith, director of the Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs, presented Bieren's mother, his wife, his sister Brianne and his father John with flags to honor Bieren.

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LEADERSHIP:

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Leadership Hermiston is a 10-month program put on by the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce, designed to give participants an opportunity to network and become familiar with Hermiston's resources. (This reporter is a member of the 2016-2018 class). They spend the first Tuesday of each month delving into a different topic, and April's was state government.

Vanessa Zamudio, a workforce consultant for the Oregon Human Development Corporation, said she signed up for Leadership Hermiston on the advice of a friend who had recently completed the course.

"She said it would be a good opportunity for me to get out in the community and learn about difference aspects in the community," Zamudio said.

She said she has learned about new resources and made connections with new people, all of which she can pass on to clients and partners in her job. Tours the group has taken so far this year have included farms, food processing plants, the fire station, police station, courthouse, armory, hospital, schools, community college, media outlets, the Agape House, Warming Station, Department of Human Services and Two Rivers Correctional Institution.

"I think this has been my favorite day so far," Zamudio said of the capitol visit. "I never knew you could just come and watch as a member of the public."

Cyndie Hobart, customer care manager for Eastern Oregon Telecom, said she likes Leadership Hermiston's "broad spectrum of exposure" to different aspects of the community, such as agriculture and education. She said she also likes getting to know the community

members going through the program with her.

"I like the mix of individuals, that they're all coming from different perspectives," she said. "Even if you have to move away, you'll have those contacts in Hermiston. The contacts you make carry with you."

Last week's capitol trip started April 10 with team-building activities followed by a reception at the Salem home of Rep. Greg Smith, where Leadership Hermiston members mingled with state legislators, department heads and lobbyists.

The next day the group learned from Smith's legislative assistant, Phillip Scheuers — a Hermiston resident — about the behind-the-scenes work that goes into legislators' decisions on bills, spoke with Smith about his role as a state legislator, met with Oregon Supreme Court Justice Jack L. Landau, learned about the role of



Rep. Greg Smith, right, speaks with members of Leadership Hermiston on the House of Representatives floor.

department heads from Business Oregon director Chris Harder, spoke to a panel of lobbyists representing Eastern Oregon issues, watched portions of the House and Senate floor sessions, spoke with House Minority Leader Mike McLane and Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, spoke with Sen. Bill Hansell, met Gov. Kate Brown and toured the capitol building.

Fran Rice, facilitator of

Leadership Hermiston and an alumni of Class 13, said the Salem trip is a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" for class members.

"It's an amazing thing to say, 'I know who Mike McLane is. I've met the governor,'" she said.

Rice said Leadership Hermiston is always evolving in an effort to give participants more tools for improving their community.

"I think the purpose of

Leadership Hermiston is to strengthen our city through relationships, knowledge of the city and to build skills for working together," she said.

Each Leadership Hermiston class must also complete a community project before their graduation in June. Past projects have ranged from planting 7,000 trees in the Oxbow site to putting together totes of supplies for children taken from their homes by DHS. Rice said support for the projects always open class members' eyes to "the big heart of the community."

This year's class is working to raise \$5,000 for a set of matching metal benches, garbage can and kiosk at Butte Park near the foot of the Hermiston Butte. Donations for the project can be made to the Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

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