

Honoring all who served

Air Force veteran shares her story with Echo students

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Echo School's annual Veterans Day parade may have been canceled, but the school kept its tradition of making sure students heard firsthand from a local veteran about what it's like to serve in the armed forces.

This year's keynote speaker — whose words were broadcast live during a virtual assembly — was Colleen R. Shaw Piercy, SSgt. E-5, United States Air Force, who served from 1995 to 2001. She talked about the "why" of her service to her country during her Wednesday, Nov. 11 speech.

It started when she was 17, and saw military service as a way to get out of "sandy, windy" Eastern Oregon, see the world and learn a trade.

"After I learned more about my job and I defended my country, my 'why' for joining the armed forces evolved and became much more. The ultimate goal at the end of the day was to support and defend our country. Being a part of the team to protect the rights of speech, press, petition, religion and assembly gave me satisfaction," she said.

Piercy described the rigors of boot camp, where she and other recruits were "broken down" and rebuilt physically and mentally. To prepare them for a job where inattention to detail could result in lives lost, they



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Colleen R. Shaw Piercy, SSgt. E-5, United States Air Force, who served from 1995 to 2001, speaks to a virtual crowd during a Veterans Day assembly in the Echo High School gymnasium on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020.

learned to treat everything in their life with exactness.

"Every stray string on your clothes needed to be clipped off. Every T-shirt needed to be folded just right," she said. "I remember taking tweezers and pulling each little edge of the T-shirt so it was all flush."

After boot camp, Piercy

worked in space system operations. At Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado, she worked to launch and operate GPS satellites that the military uses in combat and planning, and the defense satellites used to monitor for missile launches and other threats.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A group of Echo sixth-graders performs a song in honor of Veterans Day at a virtual assembly on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020.

Her next tour was in Australia, where she worked to monitor and analyze data from defense satellites.

"I was the front line of detection of missile launches, satellite launches and nuclear satellites," she said. "I could detect what kind of missile, where it was originating from and where it was heading."

Her next work, in Spain, was tracking "space junk" with a high-powered telescope so that military satellites could avoid a collision. Her final work for the Air Force, at Edwards Air Force Base in California, was classified.

After an honorable discharge, Piercy worked for Boeing to help launch the Sirius XM satellite before family health issues brought her back to Eastern Oregon. She started to work for Good

Shepherd Medical Center as an admitting clerk and went back to school to become a radiology technologist.

Although she is no longer enlisted, Piercy said her time in the Air Force taught her attention to detail, courage, integrity and how to be a team player, and she said she has tried to instill those same values in her children. "The military helped mold me into the person I am today," she said.

After her remarks, Echo School District Superintendent Raymon Smith encouraged students and other community members watching the broadcast to thank veterans they see for their service. He described how his father, a Vietnam veteran, refused to seek needed help and support available

to him as a veteran because of how badly he was treated after he returned from war.

"When he got home he was spit on, he was called names, he had things thrown at him, and he was treated as a second rate citizen for a political stance he didn't have a say in, that he didn't have a choice in. But he went because he was drafted; he went and served his country," Smith said.

He said that's why Echo hosts Veterans Day events each year, so that students can understand the sacrifices that veterans have made and appreciate their service.

"It is vitally important that we as a country remember to thank our service members, and remember to say we support them as people," he said.

Fish'n the Brave treats vets to a day on the river

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla hosted an event honoring veterans Saturday, Nov. 7, with the fifth annual Fish'n the Brave event.

About 60 veterans, a few with their active-duty sons or daughters in tow, spent the day fishing on the Columbia River with top-of-the-line gear and boats captained by experienced fishing guides. Tony Fisher, who runs Fisher's Catch Outfitters in Kennewick, Washington, said the event began five years ago when his son asked if they could take some veterans on a free trip for Veterans Day.

"He said, 'Hey Dad, I think we should take some veterans out,' and I said OK and did a Facebook post," Fisher said.

The first year about 12 veterans responded to the post, and Fisher did a drawing to take four of them out. Afterward, some of his other friends in the guide business offered to donate their services, and the event continued to grow, with a high of 87 veterans in 2019.

Fisher said next year he plans to do the event on the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attacks instead of the Saturday before Veterans Day, so that the weather is warmer.

He said Fish'n the Brave has become a fun way to say thanks to people who have served their country.



Mark Ribich/Contributed Photo

Veterans and fishing guides set out on a free guided fishing expedition on the Columbia River on Saturday, Nov. 7, 2020.

"It's one of those things to give back to veterans, to let them know we support them, and just let them have some fun out on the water," he said.

He's gotten good feedback each year, he said. Participants range from veterans whose services was decades ago to one veteran who had just recently gotten out of the hospital from injuries sustained overseas. With all branches of the service mixed together at the event, sometimes there's a little friendly "razzing" that goes on between the different branches.

A writeup of this year's event by Cathy Stolz, president of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 37 in Hermiston, described the scene:

"Once on the water, seasoned guides sped to the best

fishing spots and assisted their honored charges with anything and everything requested. One team drew a 9" sturgeon alongside their craft. After bragging-rights photos were taken, the fabulous creature regained its freedom. Throughout the day, many other photographs were taken of happy Veterans with their catches, all of which were released back into the river."

Stolz said Fish'n the Brave was prepared to serve up to 100 veterans, but fewer showed up. Next year, she said, the American Legion hopes to help advertise the opportunity to its members.

"We exist to help Veterans," she said in an email. "This local event is amazing! We want to be more involved in the future."

The Umatilla Chamber of

Commerce and Visitor Center helped get sponsors for the event and do some of the legwork, and the chamber's president, Mark Ribich, said they were happy to help. The event helped local businesses by drawing fishing guides and veterans from the region into Umatilla, he said, "but the bigger mission was Tony's mission, which was serving veterans."

Sponsors provided a sack lunch and outdoor dinner for the veterans, funding to help cover costs of the event, and prizes to add to the drawing Fisher did for fishing gear and vouchers for guided trips.

Signups for next year's free event on Sept. 11, 2021, are already available on the Fisher's Catch Outfitters website at fisherscatchoutfitters.com/fishn-the-brave.

**Turning 65?
Medicare
sign-up help?
Medicare
Supplements?
Part D Rx Plans?**



Josh Goller
Health Agent

**QUESTIONS?
WE HAVE ANSWERS!**

**Get the help you need locally
from a trusted professional!
Compare many plans
with just one call!**



125 SE 7th St., Hermiston • 541-289-7261
www.simmonshealthinsurance.partners

ROBERT B. HOPP, M.D.
& ASSOCIATES

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN
DERMATOLOGY

Call for an Appointment:
Toll Free
(855) 525-4677

Hermiston:
1050 W. Elm St., Ste #220
Hermiston, OR 97838
(541) 289-4601

Kennewick:
8901 W. Gage Blvd
Kennewick, WA 99336
(509) 735-1100

MEET OUR HERMISTON TEAM!

SPECIALIZING IN

Mohs and Skin Cancer Surgery



JULIE HEREFORD, DCPN

- Mole Mapping
- Mole and Cyst Removal
- Photodynamic Light Therapy
- Skin Cancer Surgery
- Mohs Surgery
- Full Body Skin Exams
- Allergy Patch Testing



ROBERT B. HOPP, MD



We are grateful...

to the patients who have entrusted us with their care, and to the healthcare professionals in our community who support our efforts to keep cancer care close to home. At Eastern Oregon Cancer Center, we know the importance of being close to home while receiving cancer treatment — during the holidays and all year long. We offer state-of-the-art radiation therapy in Pendleton, so that patients can spend less time traveling to cancer treatments, and more time enjoying the holidays.

For more information,
call **541.304.2264** or visit
PendletonCancer.com.



**EASTERN OREGON
CANCER
CENTER** at Pendleton