

## CG community pays tribute, says thanks to vets

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An honor guard comprising all United States military branches participated in a formal ceremony held at the third annual Veterans Day Speedfest at the Attessa racetrack on Saturday.

CASA GRANDE — The Casa Grande community said thank you to veterans in several Veterans Day events held in the area over the weekend.

On Friday, at the Caliche Senior Living facility, a group of approximately 20 veterans, including servicemen from the Vietnam and Korean wars, were honored at a pinning ceremony conducted by Casa De La Luz Hospice.

Keri Lamont, director of business development for Casa De La Luz Hospice, told the assembled veterans that she has enormous respect for the selfless dedication they had shown for their country.

“I have a huge respect for the sacrifices, the commitment and dedication that you have put forward to protect and defend our country,” said an emotional Lamont.

“Thank you for the sacrifices you made and your willingness to serve our country. You endured hardships and you were willing to risk your life to maintain our freedom. Please accept our deep thanks and gratitude and as a symbol of our appreciation we would like to present you with a pin today. It is just a small token as we pin you but it means the world to us. When you see this pin, know that your service to the nation is deeply appreciated by all of us, thank you.”

Lamont pinned badges on veterans and also gave out badges to surviving spouses in honor of those servicemen and women who had passed away.

Lamont told PinalCentral that it is important that veterans are remembered and ceremonies such as that one help in keeping those memories alive.

“The idea is to honor, recognize and say thank you to the veterans that have served in our national military, armed forces and various branches. Oftentimes it’s important to come for those who have fought in foreign wars and it’s been many years since their service and we don’t want to forget,” Lamont said.

Veterans honored at the Caliche Senior Living pinning ceremony were: Eugene Sutt, Armand Bernis, Bruce Ray, John Engel, Joe Palmer, Darell Carey, Delbert Dagley, Alonzo Goldsberry, Leonard Mead, Joe Peach, Frank Hernandez, Charles Staley and Bill Queale.

Spouse and family members representing deceased veterans: Ruth Smith for John Smith, Colleen Lewis for Leroy Lewis, Judy Duncan for Gary Duncan, Sarah Weddle for Austin Weddle, Peggy Clark for Robert Croll, Dwight W. Walker for Charly M. Walker, Carol Crane for Emmett Crane.

On Saturday at the Attesa racetrack, the third annual Veterans Day Speedfest attracted large numbers. The event featured a keenly contested National Auto Sport Association road race, food trucks, jumping castles, a band and a formal ceremony that included an honor guard from Casa Grande Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1677.

Dignitaries in attendance included Pinal County Supervisor Steve Miller, Casa Grande Mayor Craig McFarland, Mayor-elect Lisa Navarro Fitzgibbons and Robert Miller, president of the Pinal County Veterans Memorial Foundation.

Event organizer Lisa Erickson told PinalCentral that the Podium Club at the Attesa racetrack as well as the motor sport community in general wanted to honor and support local veterans. Erickson added that both she and her husband Dan (who is the managing partner of the Podium Club) had parents in the military and are extremely thankful for their service.

“Dan and I and both our parents, our dads are veterans. They were both in Vietnam and we support our veteran community here, locally and just nationwide. I think what we are doing today here at Attesa is our way of being able to be able to give back.”

Erickson said the donations to the Pinal County Veterans Memorial Foundation had been quadrupled compared to last year’s event and was heartened by the community’s support for the memorial, which is currently under construction on Pinal Avenue in Ed Hooper Rodeo Park.

“This year’s event has been twice as big as last year, if not more. We’ve raised about four times more than we did last year and so we’re really excited about that,” she said.

PCVMF President Robert Miller told PinalCentral he and his organization are grateful to the Podium Club and to all at the Attesa racetrack who had donated their time and effort in supporting an important cause.

“I think ultimately honoring veterans is our goal,” Miller said. “The memorial is obviously to remember the men and women that died in action but as a whole on Veterans Day we want to make sure that we’re celebrating all veterans that have served and signed up for making the ultimate sacrifice if they have to. It’s great to be able to hold an event like this on the weekend and to be able to celebrate and acknowledge our veteran members of the community.”

Army veteran Kelly Silva, who is Arizona District 10 commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a member of Casa Grande VFW Post 1677, told PinalCentral that it is important that veterans of all conflicts and eras are remembered and honored.

“It’s great to be honored and to show honor to the rest of the veterans out there,” said Silva.

“I think we forget about how big Veterans Day is and I don’t think that we’re honored enough. We’re given a day to be honored, but it’s nice to see the community come together and come out and thank us for what we do and what we’ve done, whether or not we’ve gone overseas. I like to see the community come together,” she said.

Miller concurred with Silva’s remarks and told PinalCentral that veterans are very deserving of extra attention and gratitude for their service.

“On Veterans Day and I say it every time I speak, we do not recognize our veterans enough. We don’t really know what they contributed to our freedom,” Miller said.

“Take the ones that paid the ultimate price that aren’t able to be here to enjoy this day. We’re going to hand out a token of some type but it’s a mere thank you. This country is where it is today because of our best veterans. There’s just no other way to put it; you can’t give them enough thanks for protecting the freedoms that we have.”

During the formal ceremony each branch of the military was honored with a separate flag carried out that was accompanied by music of each branch of service.

Mayor McFarland told the gathering that Veterans Day symbolizes selflessness shown by so many in protecting the freedoms that many Americans enjoy today.

“Let us pause not just to celebrate freedom but to acknowledge those who have protected and preserved it upon great personal cost,” said McFarland.

“To our veterans here today and to those not with us but whose sacrifices resonate throughout time, we say thank you. Thank you for your service. Your service is a testament of courage and resilience and unwavering dedication to this nation.”

Mayor-elect Navarro-Fitzgibbons thanked veterans, whom she described as “ordinary people” who left their homes and families to preserve freedoms.

“Veterans Day is one day that we honor those who unselfishly placed their lives on the line for our freedoms. We must remember these are ordinary people, men and women. They are our fathers like my father and my uncles. They are our mothers, our children and our neighbors that heard their call of duty and answered it. They left their families, they left their homes, they left their children and they left their lives to fight and protect our country for us to maintain our way of living,” she said.