

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Students thank local veterans in patriotic observance

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Schools 2022 Veterans Day Celebration on Friday, Nov. 11, at the Fine Arts Center was, for another year running, an inspiring and heartfelt show of recognition, gratitude and honor from the students of the district to all United States military veterans.

"Today we gather to honor and thank all our veterans and their families," began Ashley Shipes, the student keynote speaker. "It is a day we come together to remember all our military veterans, both men and women. We will never forget their service to our country."

Shipes pointed out that Veterans Day started as Armistice Day in 1918 at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month when a temporary cessation of hostilities, or armistice, was declared between the Allied Nations and Germany.

Though World War I

actually ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 19, 1919, Armistice Day – Nov. 11, 1918 – remained in people's minds as the end of the conflict, and that name and date became the tradition.

On June 1, 1954, with the Korean War and World War II having been fought, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed legislation striking the word "Armistice" in favor of "Veterans," and from then on, Nov. 11 became Veterans Day every year in honor of American veterans of all wars.

Shipes said she would always be proud of family members who served, one of whom is currently a medic in the National Guard.

"I was also told a special story about my great uncle, Fred Bradburn, who served during World War II as a light machine gunner," Shipes said. "He was killed in action in France and is buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery (there)."



Eight local veterans received Quilts of Valor during the Nov. 11 Veterans Day Program at Union County Schools to honor them for their service in the U.S. military. Photo by Mark Smith

See *Thanking Veterans*, Page 6A

Historical Society recognizes four local military heroes



(L-R) Mickey Cummings, Libby Stevens, Sharon Hunter, Cindy Hunter Hacker and Eric Rich spoke on behalf of local veteran heroes Leon Davenport, D.L. Martin, Franklin Hunter and Eric England, respectively, in the Historical Society's Nov. 11 Veterans Day event.

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On the evening of Veterans Day, Friday, Nov. 11, inside the Old Courthouse, the Union County Historical Society hosted its inaugural Veterans Ceremony honoring four legendary local veterans in D.L. Martin, Franklin Hunter, Eric England and Leon

Davenport.

The meeting began with Historical Society President Mickey Cummings commending North Georgia Veteran's Month Markers for the dozens of handmade markers placed around the square downtown.

Cummings also previewed upcoming concerts at the Old Courthouse, such as Roy Perren with "An Elvis Christmas"

See *Local Heroes*, Page 3A

Veterans honored in annual Rotary Club luncheon

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Friday, Nov. 11, the Union County Rotary Club held a special luncheon inside the Union County Community Center to honor the country's valued military servicemembers for Veterans Day.

The second annual

observance began with a welcome from Rotary Club President Richard Raborn, who recounted the pertinence of the Rotary motto of "Service Above Self" and introduced the Master of Ceremonies, Navy Veteran Gene Windham.

"I have spoken in front of many groups in my career, but I have never been more humbled to speak to a group than I am

this group of veterans here today," Windham said. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your service to our country and the sacrifices that all of you have made in one form or another."

"Veterans Day is an opportunity to honor those that have served the country in any way and in any of the military

See *Rotary Luncheon*, Page 6A



Local dignitaries with keynote speaker Maj. Gen. Thomas M. Carden Jr., second from right, during the Nov. 11 Rotary Club Veterans Luncheon. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Cruisers give to Give-A-Gift; sheriff minting new coins



UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer, Chief Deputy John George, Chief Jailor Tommy Holbrooks, Sheriff Mack Mason and Blairsville Cruisers Car Club Veterans Coordinator Charles Turner during a Sheriff's Office Give-A-Gift Program donation last week. Photo/Submitted

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Members of the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club joined Union County Sheriff Mack Mason on Wednesday, Nov. 9, to present a \$2,500 donation

check for the Sheriff's Give-A-Gift for the Christmas Program for underprivileged children.

"We just appreciate these folks so much," Sheriff Mason said of car club members and those who support their efforts. "We can't continue this program unless people help us financially."

The Sheriff's Office collects Christmas program donations all throughout the year, and those can be made by groups and individuals at the front office of 378 Beasley Street in Blairsville.

See *Give-A-Gift*, Page 2A

Early voting for senate runoff will be Nov. 28-Dec. 2

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Early in-person voting for the U.S. Senate Runoff Election between Republican Herschel Walker and Democratic Incumbent Raphael Warnock has been set for the week after Thanksgiving, to run Monday, Nov. 28, through Friday, Dec. 2.

A runoff is needed because neither Walker nor Warnock cleared the majority hurdle to win outright. Walker earned 48.52% of the vote to Warnock's 49.42%. The election will only feature the top two vote-getters, leaving out Libertarian Chase Oliver, who garnered 2.07% of the vote.

In-person early voting will occur in the Jury Assembly Room of the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, with voting hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Runoff Election Day voting will take place Tuesday, Dec. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at



Ivy Log Precinct poll workers closing out the polls on Nov. 8 Election Night. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the 11 pre-assigned precincts of Union County.

Voters may request mail-in absentee ballots through Monday, Nov. 28, and if people checked that they were elderly or disabled on a previous application this year, they should receive a mailed ballot automatically without having to submit another application.

Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find it in the Jury Assembly Room during early voting hours. Completed absentee ballots may also be dropped off at the Registrar's Office inside

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Runoff Voting...from Page 1A

the courthouse up to 7 p.m. on Election Day.

By accessing the “My Voter Page” at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>, voters may request an absentee ballot and find their registration status, precinct information, mailed absentee ballot status, voter participation history and more.

Nov. 7 was the voter registration deadline to be eligible to participate in the federal runoff.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger announced last week that the statewide “Risk Limiting Audit” required following November general elections in even-numbered years would begin in all counties on Thursday, Nov. 17, to be open to the public.

The audit will consist of a hand count of random ballot batches to compare with machine-counted election results, and the race to be audited will be the Secretary of State election, which Raffensperger won Nov. 8 with 53.25% of the vote.

Separately, in the interest of transparency, the Union County Board of Elections hosted a public hand count audit for the local governor and senate election results on Monday, Nov. 14. The results were not available at press time.

In other election news, for the only contested county-level race to appear on the ballot last week, Union County voters overwhelmingly chose Republican Incumbent Tony Hunter over Democratic challenger Michelle Maloney for Union County Board of Education District 2.

Hunter earned 83.44% of the vote and will swear into his fourth term in January.

“I really do appreciate the confidence that the public entrusts me with, because it could be anybody in this position, and hopefully I won’t let them down,” Hunter said. “Collectively, we have an awesome board, and we all work for the betterment of the community and the great education that our kids are getting – they all have a heart for it.”

The re-elected School Board member said he looks forward to continuing the school system’s mission of remaining “Union United” and providing “Success For ALL,” with a goal of making Union County not just No. 1 in the state, but in the United States.

“We have the greatest staff and the greatest school system around,” he said, noting that he is grateful to be surrounded by similarly high-performing school systems in the North Georgia

Mountains.

Republicans Jason McCarter and Incumbent Patrick White ran unopposed in their School Board districts, and they will join Hunter in being sworn in come January.

This was an above-average year of voting for a midterm election, with the state reporting about 71% of the Union County electorate having cast ballots in the 2022 General Election, compared with the 67% turnout in 2018.

Of course, these numbers pale in comparison to recent presidential election year turnouts, with a whopping 85% of active Union County voters showing up in 2016 and 81% in 2020.

Midterm turnout was up across the state as well, bolstered by the many opportunities to vote in Georgia, from access to no-excuse absentee ballots to 17 days of early voting.

Union County had the third highest voter turnout in the state for the 2022 Midterm Elections, behind only Oconee County at 74.48% and Green County at 71.52%.

Big election wins last week included Gov. Brian Kemp, who beat repeat challenger Democrat Stacey Abrams by a comfortable margin, as well as District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter with 84.3% of the vote, and 9th Congressional District U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde with more than 72%.

Give-A-Gift...from Page 1A

Monetary donations are most useful, as gifts are purchased based on children’s wish lists, but people wanting to donate toys for kids up to age 12 should make sure they are new and unwrapped when dropped off at the Sheriff’s Office, and no toy weapons, please.

Many program referrals come in partnership with the local schools, but families looking to take part in the program can apply directly at the Sheriff’s Office the first full week after Thanksgiving. Parents should bring driver’s licenses as proof of residency and kids’ birth certificates.

And following the success of the Sheriff’s Office Challenge Coin Give-A-Gift fundraiser, which sold out in a matter of days last month, Mason is working to have more coins minted to give people additional opportunities to grab a collectible while giving back to their community.

“We hope for them to be here within six weeks, and we will run a notice in the paper when the coins come in,” Sheriff Mason said. “We’ve had an overwhelming response from the public, selling 150 coins within two and a half days of the North Georgia News article (in October).”

The Cruisers make their donation annually, also giving to many other groups in and around the communities where the club enjoys membership, including Union and Towns counties in Georgia, and in Clay County, North Carolina, all to benefit “needy kids at Christmas.”

The club hosts its own Shop With A Cruiser event each year, taking 80 kids shopping at Walmart, and the Cruisers donate to similar area programs, like the Blairsville Police Department Shop With A Cop, Hiwassee PD Shop With A Hero, the Towns County Sheriff’s Office Shop With The Sheriff, and the Clay County Sheriff’s Office Cops for Kids Christmas.

“On average, we raise between \$30,000 to \$40,000 every year with our main car raffle,” Cruisers President Dick Couture said. “The funds all go into the Blairsville Cruisers as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and we distribute funds to several organizations to help kids at Christmastime.”

“So, all of it goes for needy kids at Christmas with the exception of a few thousand dollars that we do for technical and trade school scholarships, and then we help other people in the community as needed.”

The raffle is always a huge success for the Cruisers, who promote it during April-November cruise-ins in Blairsville. They also attend various annual festivals throughout the year, selling tickets at the Blairsville Sorghum Festival and Butternut Creek Festival, for example.

Additionally, car club volunteers assist law enforcement Christmas shopping programs by chaperoning kids, a favor returned by the Sheriff’s Office during Shop With A Cruiser, so the number of children who benefit from the time and money given by the car enthusiasts is immense.

“We respect law enforcement,” Couture said regarding the Cruisers’ close working relationships with area deputies and police. “Many of us are veterans of the military, and we support veterans, we support police, and we support needy kids.”

“And if it wasn’t for the support from the community, a lot of these kids wouldn’t have a Christmas, so that’s our primary goal, is to help the kids that really need it. And we vet (those kids) through the school systems in most cases.”

For more information about the car club, including how to join and/or help out with its many initiatives, visit <https://blairvillecruisers.com/>.

Blairsville Cruisers contribute to “Shop With A Hero”



Blairsville Cruisers Car Club President Dick Couture presents a check to Hiwassee Chief of Police Paul Smith as a contribution to the “Shop with a Hero” program for needy children at Christmas. Over 35% of the membership of the car club resides in Towns County and on behalf of those members the club is proud to once again support this local program in Hiwassee.

The Blairsville Cruisers donate annually to this and other local programs as a way to help within the community. The Cruisers are blessed with the support of Towns County residents. Our sponsors and donors make it possible to reach our goal that no child goes without at Christmas.

Since its founding in



Hiwassee Chief of Police Paul Smith receives a contribution from Blairsville Cruisers Car Club Dick Couture for the local Shop with a Hero program.

2007, the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club has raised money for needy Children. The club raffles a car each year as it’s main fund raiser for these programs. The car club will take 80 needy children this year with our Shop With A Cruiser

program as well contributing to Union, Towns and Clay Counties needy children’s programs such as Shop With A Cop, Shop With A Hero, Shop With The Sheriff, Cops 4 Kids, Sheriff’s Give-A-Gift and other local programs.

Local Heroes...from Page 1A

at 5:30 p.m.," Cummings said, before segueing back into the program at hand that evening.

"What would we be doing tonight if it was not for our veterans?" Cummings asked. "We have a very good lifestyle in America, and sometimes we forget about the important things that people (in the service) have done for us to live the kind of life we have today.

"So, let's take the time to say 'thank you' to the Lord above for those veterans that have kept us free here in this country."

Libby Stevens started the recognitions with a discussion about her father D.L. Martin, who served in the Navy and passed away at the age of 96 in 2018.

There wasn't much opportunity in the area back when Martin decided to join the military, as "much of the game had run out" and Union County was operating primarily on "a barter system."

"While he was in the military, he did not know how to swim at the time, and he had two ships go down under him," Stevens said. "The next time he was not so lucky; he got shrapnel in his knee that hurt him 'til the day he died.

"He also contracted malaria in the service, but the best thing he contracted was discipline, self-confidence, and knowledge that there was something else out there, that there was something he couldn't find on the farm. He found there was something he wanted more - that's what the military did for him.

"(As a result), he was a master dry-cleaner, was instrumental in starting the thought process of starting a Chamber of Commerce; he was one of the founding members of the Kiwanis Club and last living charter member of it until his death; he started football here in Union County (and helped start a medical clinic that would later become Union General Hospital)."

Then, sisters Cindy Hunter Hacker and Sharon Hunter highlighted their father Franklin Hunter, who was born in the Choestoe area, served a career in the Air Force, and passed away at the age of 84 in 2017.

They shared many facts about Franklin, including that he graduated from Union County High in 1949, joined the Air

Force at 17, and by the time he was 19, "he was in Korea as an air med technician training to provide medical care to wounded servicemembers in flight."

During his first enlistment, Hunter earned the first of many air medals for participating in air medical evacuation missions transporting wounded servicemen to higher levels of medical care.

He retrained in 1965 as a Load Master, his service taking him to Turkey, Egypt, Istanbul, Iran, Korea, Vietnam and many other countries.

Hunter served many missions of humanitarian relief, surviving a hangar attack from Vietcong Guerillas, earning a United Nations Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and many other awards all citing his devotion to his country.

"Although he could not tell us about anything classified, he would tell us funny stories of things that happened between him and his crew," the sisters related. "Ultimately, (he retired) as manager of the Blairsville Airport.

"He never met a stranger, and his motto was 'Don't Sweat the Small Stuff', and he made sure that we understood that we had it much better than a lot of people in the world, and to make the most of the time we are given in life."

Next, Eric Rich presented on his uncle Eric England, a Blairsville native and a Distinguished Marksman and Sniper veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps who served in Vietnam. England passed away in 2018 at the age of 84.

Rich shared with everyone just how much his uncle influenced him during his formative years.

"My uncle was a Marine through-and-through," Rich said. "He attained values (in military service) that he instilled in me as a young boy that I still carry with me today as a man, values such as hard work, dependability and accountability.

"He was a man of few words, and very humble about all of the achievements he had in the military."

Rich highlighted several fond memories, offering a funny story about how when he was born, his mother called to tell her brother that they were naming the boy after him, "and then my uncle said, 'Why in the hell would you wanna do that?'"

The bottom line was this:

England was the true definition of "the measure of a man," and Rich made sure to "thank all veterans for their service, and hope everyone has a happy Veterans Day."

Presenting on Blairsville native Leon Davenport, Cummings related that he was "born one mile from the Old Courthouse, turning 18 years old on Dec. 9, 1944, and celebrated by reporting for duty the very next month on Jan. 10, 1945, beginning his military career in the Army."

Cummings noted that Davenport, who passed away at 90 in 2017, remarked in his journals that he began "in rotations of peeling potatoes, mopping floors on kitchen patrol and cleaning detail," saying "how proud his momma was going to be of him for learning how to do that in the military."

"Following basic training," Cummings continued, "he was awarded his High School Diploma while being home. (He) was always worrying that he was going to miss World War II entirely, serving much of his time in the Philippines as a part of the 24th Infantry Division.

"(He enjoyed) six of years of service in Japan after the war ended, playing offensive, defensive and guard positions in the 21st Infantry Division Regimental Football Team who were subsequently the 1948 and 1949 Regimental Football Champions.

"(Davenport participated) in nine out of the 10 major battles of the Korean Conflict, earning a Battlefield Commission, (and) served with the 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment, his company receiving the first MCT tanks in Europe.

"(He earned) nine Air Medals, retiring from the Army in 1972 and returning to Union County to become administrator of Union General Hospital, with an ambulance service being established, a new building purchased, nursing was begun, and a faith-based chapel outreach was established all during his tenure until 1993.

"His faith in God was always the most important thing in his life, becoming the first deacon emeritus at Blairsville Baptist Church in 2010."

To close, Cummings repeated, "where would we be without our nation's veterans?" Indeed, the North Georgia News thanks every veteran for their service and hopes everyone had a gratitude-filled Veterans Day in 2022.

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Thanking Veterans...from Page 1A



In the student-led Veterans Day ceremony Friday, Changwha Koo of the 625 Foundation helped announce the dedication of the Children's Library at the Elementary School in the memory of a local soldier killed during the Korean War. Pictured here with Elementary School Principal Jerry Bavero.

"Our family goal is to one day visit his gravesite in France to honor him. I believe he was a great man whom we will never forget."

Continued Shipes, "When I look across the audience, I see many veterans and their families who are proud to have

stood and served this great country of ours. I am humbled and proud.

"I want to thank you for your service to our country. You are the reason that we can all stand proud here today and celebrate. Thank you."

As a special, first-time

part of the program, Korean immigrants Sungyull Koo and his wife, Changwha, co-founders of the 625 Foundation, traveled here all the way from Vermont to honor a local American soldier.

Sungyull said he and his wife formed the 625 Foundation to educate Koreans about how America helped save South Korea from a communist fate. The Kooos were just kids in 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea.

Sungyull said, in his experience, many of his fellow Koreans today, especially the young, seem to know nothing of the Korean War and how American soldiers fought and died so they could be free.

The Kooos' goal is to honor a soldier each year from one of the 50 states who was killed in Korea. So far, they have honored 20 American veterans from 20 different states, with Georgia being the 21st state.

They are honoring Cpl. Claud Norman Stevens of Blairsville who went missing in action in November 1950. Stevens' remains were never recovered and he was finally assumed killed in action.

His name is inscribed with the missing on the Honolulu Memorial.

"Today we are here," said Sungyull to the audience. "Last month was our 48th anniversary. None of this would have been possible without the sacrifice of the American soldiers – all 36,516 of them.

"So, for us, for our family, our friends, and all grateful South Koreans, I want to say thank you very much."

Sungyull and Changwha presented Union County Elementary School Principal Gerald Bavero with a plaque and a check in the amount of \$5,033 for the Elementary School Library and Media Center in honor of Stevens.

The Sons of the American Revolution awarded Henry Lee Stevens and the Stevens family a Gold Star Award in honor of Claud Stevens' ultimate sacrifice in service to the United States Army.

Moving along, eight veterans were awarded Quilts

of Valor at this year's event: Todd Atkins, U.S. Navy; Kaela Rowsey, U.S. Army; Ben Chapman, Army; Jordan Allison, Army; William Harold Killian, Army; Connie Bergstrom, Navy; Amanda Parker, U.S. Air Force; and Steven Parker, Army.

The Quilts of Valor ceremony was performed by students Eloise Whisenhunt, Liam Cone, Nate Johnson, Eli Underwood and Sophie Truex, who made a flawless presentation.

The Union County High School Band and Chorus and the Middle School Band and Chorus together did outstanding renditions of "The Star-Spangled Banner," "God Bless the USA," "Armed Forces Medley," "Song for the Unsung Hero," "America the Beautiful," and "Stars and Stripes Forever."

And it's become almost a tradition to hear UCHS Chorus Director Alicia Covington (vocals), UCHS Band Director

Will Stafford (saxophone), and UCHS Theater Director Chris Adams (vocals and keyboard) perform "Amazing Grace."

The 152nd Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol and members of the American Legion Post 121 together performed the Posting of the Colors.

The North Georgia Honor Guard did a five-gun salute following U.S. Marine Staff Sgt. Dylan Syverson and U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Justin Smith's presentation of Honoring the Fallen and the Missing Man Ceremony.

Jaylen Hogsed and Brady Hussion were excellent co-masters of ceremony and stepped in to help retired U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Art McCann.

And a special thanks to McCann, who has spent countless hours working with students and staff to make each and every Veterans Day presentation run smoothly for the last nine years.

Rotary Luncheon...from Page 1A



Local veterans Presented the Colors in Friday's Veterans Luncheon at the Community Center.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

services. This was a chance for us to honor the veterans that have protected our freedoms, and I am honored to have been one of those who served.

"So, (helping to organize this event) was a work of love for me, and I am passionate about it, and we are going to continue to do this and make this an annual event for our veterans."

An invocation was offered by Pastor David Wesche of the All-Saints Lutheran Church: "I thank God for the invitation to be here with you all to celebrate you and what God has done through you for the freedoms that we have not only today, not only yesterday, but into the future."

The Honor Guard Presented the Colors, and Windham led the Pledge of Allegiance, with the National Anthem being performed by Richard Hoibraten before an honoring of the Missing Man Table by Patricia Kenny signifying fallen heroes who never returned home from war.

A brief message was delivered by local photographer Paul McCullough from Honor Flight of Middle Tennessee: "Although I am not a veteran, I am honored and thank you all for letting me be involved and for your gracious service to our country."

Ed Crenshaw, commander of Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 and the Secretary of the Veterans Commanders Group, gave a short recognition of all veterans in attendance and the members of various veteran-based groups and organizations.

Rob Mawyer of the

Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Project then stepped up to announce the hope that the park would be opening in Meeks Park on Veterans Day 2023. For more information and to donate to the cause, visit www.appalachianveteransmemorialpark.org.

There was then a break for the buffet food service, and after everyone ate, Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe manned the podium to share some thoughts before announcing the day's keynote speaker.

"The chamber is very glad to be a part of this because we appreciate our veterans," Rowe said. "It is one of our beliefs that our great country is built on these veterans, as my father was in the Korean War.

"Quite honestly, I'm just honored; if you look around, you will see that a lot of our veterans are aging, and so it is nice to be able to celebrate what they've done. It's good to see everybody come together, and it's all about the veterans, it's all about the country.

"There is no divide here. It's a united force of all the branches of services being recognized here, and it is truly amazing to have the community here to support these veterans and tell them 'Thank You.'"

Rowe welcomed keynote speaker, Maj. Gen. Thomas M. Carden Jr., the currently presiding Adjutant General of the Georgia Department of Defense, which is over the Georgia National Guard.

Appointed to his post by Gov. Brian Kemp in January 2019, Carden is "responsible

for directing, coordinating, organizing and stationing the Army and Air National Guards of the State of Georgia, the Georgia State Defense Force, and federal and state civilians, ensuring their readiness to perform state and national missions."

"The turnout that we have here today shows a lot about our community and the support we have for our veterans," Carden said. "I also want to take time to thank the families of veterans as well.

"When I go through airports and different places and people recognize someone as a veteran and tell them, 'Thank you for your service,' it's great, but no one recognizes the families for what they've done and sacrificed, like the birthdays that have been missed and the first steps of a child."

Added Carden, "As I go and visit many places, I can tell that this is an exceptional community for taking care of and supporting our veterans."

Carden reiterated that he was humbled to be in the presence of every veteran before him, on top of being honored to have served himself, and he thanked everyone for being there that day and sharing freedoms together.

Maj. Gen. Carden closed the ceremony by recognizing the oldest veteran in attendance, 100-year-old Sgt. Jimmy Lewis of the Army Air Corps during World War II. He presented Lewis with a challenge coin and saluted him for his service.

The Honor Guard then came out one more time to Retire the Colors and finalize the ceremony.