

Gallup-McKinley County celebrates Veterans Day

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Honors men and women who gave their all

Despite the brutal cold, Veterans Day was celebrated in Gallup Nov. 12 with scheduled events to honor all veterans, past and present.

Gallup-McKinley Veterans Committee members and Veterans Helping Veterans hosted the events, which began at the Hillcrest Cemetery in Gallup with an observance ceremony at the Veterans Plot, followed by a parade.

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The parade followed Aztec Avenue to McKinley County Courthouse Square, where those who braved the elements took part in the official ceremony to honor the country's veterans.

Naomi Sandoval sang the national anthem in Navajo as tiny snowflakes swirled about the square.

Flags were passed out to attendees, and patriotism was palpable in the air.

The Acknowledgement of Dignitaries was presented by David Cuellar of Veterans Helping Veterans.

As Jack Frost made his presence known at the event, Cuellar said the cold didn't prevent a solid turnout or the display of the patriotic spirit.

"I think it went well and we had a really good turnout as cold as it was. I think people here are very patriotic," Cuellar said. "The ceremonies went great at the cemetery; we had a great turnout as well up there."

Keynote speaker and McKinley-County Commissioner Bill Lee addressed the crowd about honoring all veterans.

As a cold breeze swept across the courthouse square, Lee spoke of the sacrifices and willingness of the veterans who gave their all for our freedom. He was pleased to see so many folks out to honor those who served the country.

"On such a frosty morning, it's great to see so many people coming out," Lee said. "The reason we do this is because we all need to take the time to honor the men and women who have sacrificed so much to have served, those who continue to serve and certainly those who paid the ultimate price. So it's good to see a great crowd out here and good to be a part of these festivities as we remember the veterans."

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Similar sentiments were expressed by Gallup City Councilor Linda Garcia who boldly stated her thoughts on professional sports players who take a knee during the National Anthem. Her words brought on claps and cheers from the audience.

She said we can never forget what our veterans have done and continue to do for all of us.

“To act upon this degrading idea is a complete blow to all our veterans who sacrificed for what we have now,” Garcia said.

Grand Marshall Leonardo P. Torrez was introduced with a brief statement about his service in the United States Marine Corps.

Torrez thanked attendees as Cuellar spoke of Torrez’s stint in the Vietnam War from 1969-1971 with the 2nd Battalion 11th Marines, Whiskey Battery 155 Towed, 1st Marine Division.

Torrez received a plaque as fellow marines gave him a Marine *Hoorah*.

Honoree Abel Garcia, who was killed in action during the Korean war, was recognized as well.

Abel Garcia’s youngest sister, Judy Garcia, received the plaque and thanked everyone for honoring her brother’s sacrifice.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said Gallup was true to its name when it comes to patriotism. McKinney said he was amazed at the number of people who participated in the events, from beginning to end.

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It was a great day in Gallup, McKinney said.

“Well, regardless of the cold, the patriots of our patriotic town still roll out,” he said. “The ceremonies at the cemetery were excellent, the parade was amazing — the number of people that participated in it. The message was strong that patriotism swelled, and we recognized and honored our veterans, the men and women who have served, and especially those that have given their all. It was a great day in Gallup.”

Army veteran Dan O’Key served 13 years in the 82nd Airborne Division and was present at the event. He said attending the ceremony made him feel proud and glad to be a part of it.

Watching fellow veterans receive recognition for their service was heartwarming to say the least, O’Key said.

As the ceremony came to a close, the 21-gun salute and Taps for fallen soldiers created a solemn moment for O’Key.

“It makes me feel proud to be here and be a part of one of the members of veterans,” he said.

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