

Quilts of Valor: Local vets honored for their service

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun Photos by Knifewing Segura
Friday, 14 July 2017 02:38



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“To cover veterans with comfort and healing,” was the comforting words for this year’s presentation of Quilts of Valor for local veterans June 30, at the UNM-G North Adult Education Center.

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The handmade quilts were made by the lady volunteers of the “Loyal Order of the Quilt.” Mayor Jackie McKinney proclaimed the last day of June as Proclamation of Quilts of Valor Day and gave a moving speech to honor these veterans.

The presentation of the quilts is an annual event where veterans are nominated by the public for their service to this country. This was the fifth year of this event and the following veterans were given special recognition and a quilt from the Loyal Order of the Quilt:

Melvin Taliman, Sr. (Army); Jackson Gibson (Army); Winona D. House (Air Force); James Jeffries (Navy); James Parrish (Army); Ed Carney (Army); Hoskie Jim (Army); Fred Carabajal (Air Force); Willie Thomas (Army); and Frank Ward (Army).

Each veteran was escorted by the women of the Loyal Order of the Quilt, who hand-stitched the quilts:

Esther Holiday, Anita Richardson, Nellie Kelsey, Linda Williams, Carol Toledo, Libby Kyselka, Cheryl Toledo, Beth Quintana, Bertha Joe, and Shirley Hodge.

Community turnout was great according to Laura Jijon, director of Adult Education at UNM-G North Campus. She said the presentation couldn’t have gone any smoother and it was all because of her staff and the countless volunteers who helped prepare for this event.

“Everything went perfectly and I want to thank everyone for coming out and being a part of this momentous event,” Jijon said. “It’s really a collaboration of staff and community organizations that put this all together such as: GallupARTS, Veterans Helping Veterans, Gallup Service Mart, UNM-Gallup, and of course the Loyal Order of Quilt.”

“We are a diverse community of diverse cultures, languages, ages, races, and abilities, and you can see everyone came here today to eat together and honor the veterans and enjoy. It’s a unity of Gallup and we also like to think this is a model of what Gallup can be.”

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A Presentation of Flags kicked off the event followed by the placement of a Memorial Wreath in honor of those veterans who served and have passed on. A unique singing of the Star-Spangled Banner was done in English and Navajo by Dr. Christopher Dyer (English), and Vidalis Roberts (Navajo).

Jijon said the limit of handing out a maximum of 10 quilts is done so that the event can be intimate and personable.

"We had a veteran here from the Vietnam era and in fact he was sharing with us of how badly he was treated when he returned back in 66,' and how people spit on him and called him horrible names," she said. "This was the first time he was publicly acknowledged in a positive way, and that's 50 years later."

Jackson Gibson was one of those veterans that received a quilt at the ceremony. Gibson served in the Army, engaging in two tours in Vietnam, and was surprised and excited to receive a quilt.

"I was very excited ... very surprised to get one of them, it meant a whole lot to me because of the treatment I received when I came back, especially from the Veterans Affairs," he said. "I really appreciate the ladies who done the quilts and for the veterans. I think now is the time our country needs to get back and realize the freedom we have and who made that possible ... it is the veterans. Coming back to an ungrateful nation (sic) it makes me feel good that we are really appreciated. I just love the quilt."

Ed Carney, was another recipient, who served in Vietnam 1965-1966, and was one of the first to arrive in Vietnam. He was ecstatic about receiving a quilt.

"I thought it was great. I really felt honored being that us Vietnam vets don't get much recognition in the years past," he said. "I was happy and kind of nervous being on stage in front of a lot of people. I never realized that the Valor of Quilt was such a huge organization and I really appreciate the women that honored us veterans."

Frank Ward, who served in the Army three years during the Vietnam era, was solemn as he

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also received a quilt.

“Surprised I was chosen ... I was glad that we were picked,” he said. “I thought it was pretty neat. I didn’t give it that much thought and was glad that they chose me. I love it and it’s very nice and high quality.”

David Cuellar, of the Veterans Helping Veterans organization, was moved by the support of the community for the veterans. Cuellar who was one of the first to receive a quilt five years ago shared the same sentiments for these veterans.

“I really happy for them, the quilts mean a lot,” Cuellar said. “I had served in the Army and when I received mine I felt validated, and it was nice that somebody cared you know, and a quilt is comforting.”

Every branch of the armed forces was in attendance. Phillip Ramirez, who served 23 years in the National Guard, received a quilt two years ago. Ramirez was deployed during the 911 attack and deployed to Iraq in 2005.

“Today was very inspiring, patriotic, and you feel the support from the community,” Ramirez said. “It’s an honor and it felt so good ... there are people out there that do care and it’s a great feeling.”

Tooley Brown, who served in the Navy showed his support. He received a quilt three years ago, and felt elated that someone cares for these veterans.

“No matter who they are, what color they are, it’s just a matter of good gesture,” Brown said. “For me the quilting outfit is a meticulous hobby and they pay attention to detail, so it’s an honor to receive it. I’m just a component along with these veterans, and I received it for those who were left on foreign soil as a promise to them we make these gestures ... that if no one will take care of us, we will take care of each other.”

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Ben Yazzie, who served 12 years in the Marines, was in attendance to show support not only to the veterans, but also to his wife Roda Yazzie, who helped in making the quilts.

“To be here in the presence of these guys was very emotional.” Yazzie said.

For more information on the Loyal Order of the Quilt contact Laura Jijon (505) 722-7500.

By Dee Velasco

***For the Sun
Photos by Knifewing Segura***