Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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Honoring all who served

“It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived.” – George S. Patton

Patton's words rang true for many in Gallup on Nov. 11, as families, friends and officials honored the veterans for their courageous service this past Veterans Day.

The city enjoyed a day of festivities, including a wreath ceremony, a parade downtown, and the placement of a United States flag to fly high over Gallup, which local veterans erected.

The image of wholesome gratitude seemed to reflect a Norman Rockwell painting, as veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces marched their way to the McKinley County Courthouse plaza. Kids waved their flags, elderly people saluted the vets, and a solemn appreciation was felt by all.

The ceremony following the parade featured David Cuellar of Veterans Helping Veterans, who called all veterans to attention as the posting of colors and the Pledge of Allegiance were performed. Cuellar also introduced the keynote speaker, U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., to say a few words.

Luján made a point to address veterans of the Vietnam War, who he felt never received the recognition that they deserve.

"Never forget those who were lost, never forget those who served," he said.

During the ceremony, Luján set aside a moment of remembrance for Lisa Romero, a victim of the Las Vegas shooting at the Route 91 Harvest festival last month. He presented a flag to her parents.

The flag was given to Romero's father, so that he could present it to Miyamura High School, and have it flown in her memory.

"I was an honor to be here today and to present that to Mr. Romero, her father, to the family,"

Luján said. “I thought it was a special moment, it was welcomed by everyone in attendance. Very humbling, and very sad emotional time, but one that is incredible to be a part of, to be able to celebrate in Lisa’s memory and Lisa’s life.”

After the ceremony, a procession was held at the National Guard Armory to celebrate the raising of a new flag pole with an enormous flag set to fly over the city of Gallup at the site of the future national veterans cemetery.

Knowing how much effort went into creating the event, Cuellar felt everything came together perfectly.

“It came off well, everything was well executed. We’re very proud we got our flag up and got our ceremony done downtown. It took a lot of planning and a lot of work, but now we can sit back and eat a hot dog and relax,” Cuellar said.

Many of the veterans in attendance expressed pride over the celebration. U.S. Marine veteran Dennis Gardner was thrilled by the raising of the flag, and felt it did justice to his service.

“Oh, I’m thrilled about that flag up on that hill. That denotes something to me that far surpasses other areas of being a veteran,” he said. “I appreciate that flag and I’ll fight for it anytime, for our nation, our families… it’s just good to be a veteran.”

Local historian Martin Link, who served in the U.S. Army, felt the flag was indeed a long overdue gift to veterans.

“I think the flag today represents and I hope is treated with the respect that a lot of Gallup efforts went into it,” he said.

Though Army veteran Delbert Nelson, who served in the Korean War, was happy with the gratitude that was shown at the plaza, he did not feel the recognition should be limited to Nov.

11.

“I think it’s pretty nice for everyone to get together on Veterans Day, but I think every day should be Veterans Day,” Nelson said. “We have men and women still serving all around the world and it’s what it should be. We have guys in active duty and the reserves.”

As the day drew to a close, Luján made his final remarks on Gallup’s celebration, and took a moment to think of the veterans who were not able to be home that day.

“To be here today in Gallup to commemorate, celebrate, and recognize Veterans Day was so humbling,” he said. “To be a part of the wreath laying ceremony, the parade down to civic plaza, to share a few words and remarks in a humbling fashion, thanking our veterans and their families for their sacrifices, so many that paid the ultimate sacrifice also reminded us that freedom is not free, and we should never forget our POW’s and those missing in action.”

Luján also thanked the veterans for their help in the celebration, and thanked the community for embracing them.

“Just a beautiful day to celebrate Veterans Day,” he said, “and to do it right here in Gallup, New Mexico is very special for me.”

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