

Show gratitude to a vet

Contributed by Bill Webb
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Veteran's Day is one of the few holidays that our staff does not have as a paid day off.

This year on Veteran's Day, I found myself on my way to work earlier than most days. I stopped at a nearby grocery shortly after 6 a.m. to grab a cup of coffee and a quick bite of breakfast. Store managers and other employees were putting up long tables and chairs everywhere they could fit them in the store's deli/dining area in preparation for the free breakfast buffet for veterans and active duty military personnel.

Veterans had not yet begun to arrive en masse. People were scattered in the regular seating; undoubtedly some of them were vets and qualified for the free meal. A checker told me they estimated serving about a thousand veterans a year earlier; word has gotten around over the past few years so the crowd at this particular location has grown steadily.

I ate quickly, watching as staff filled every nook and cranny in the eating area of this modern supermarket with more tables and chairs. Anticipation was growing, even if the crowd had not yet materialized.

As I finished my meal and approached the cashier to pay for what I — a non-veteran — had eaten, a gentleman older than myself approached the area. I inquired if he had been active in the military, wondering at first if he might have served during World War II. Instead, I suggested that he likely was not old enough to have served in that conflict.

The gentleman volunteered that his service dated back to 1955, about a decade after WWII. "God bless you," I told him as I thanked him for his service to our country and to me as a citizen. I was only 5 when he first suited up.

Two days later, I dropped by for another cup of coffee on my way to work. I suggested to the server that Monday morning must have been a busy day for them. She nodded that it was. She indicated a conversation with one of the vets. He had come by for breakfast and found himself sitting with other vets he did not know, but in the end had a wonderful time as each reflected on his/her service and their thoughts about their experiences.

Without a doubt, each experience was different. They were different ages, had served in many different places and in many different conflicts during our nation's past 75 years or so. Many had served more recently, and some were still active in service.

A day to honor and thank veterans is a good thing, but I have observed that people in airports and restaurants go out of their way to stop men and women in uniform and thank them for their service. Most of these people could have found day

jobs with far less risk but instead gravitated to the calling of national defense.

It is always appropriate to shake the hands of these people, thank them for their service, offer a prayer of encouragement for their safety and to leave them with a heartfelt, "God bless you."

I feel the same way about teachers, other public servants, pastors and other spiritual leaders, physicians and many other people who day by day, sometimes moment by moment, engage in activities — often vocational — in service to others.

Too often we overlook the servants among us. That's too bad. Because of their service, they are not hard to spot.

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