Bronson Community Remembers Those Who Sacrificed All for Their Country

Dick Mudd places an American Flag on the grave of Richard E. McGraw, a U.S. Navy veteran buried at Rosemary Cemetery. American flags were placed on the graves of all military veterans. *Photo by Terry Witt.*

By Terry Witt
Senior Staff Writer

Veterans and members of the communitygathered at Rosemary Cemetery in Bronson Monday to pay tribute to the fallen warriors of all wars.

County Commissioner John Meeks quoted former President Harry S. Truman as saying the country's debt to the heroic men and valiant women who served the country can never be repaid.

"They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices," Meeks said, quoting Truman.

AmVet Post 88 of Bronson sponsored the Memorial Day celebration.

Meeks also asked everyone to remember those who survived war but returned with mental and physical scars.

"Have we forgotten?"Meeks added, that 20 percent of the 2.3 million veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan returned with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder along with an estimated 460,000 who self-medicate with alcohol and drugs.

Of the 2.6 million Vietnam War veterans, Meeks said, studies show four out of five showed signs of PTSD at some point in their life. Some experienced bouts of depression, hurting others or themselves.

He noted 5,000 veterans commit suicide every year.

PTSD is the leading cause of homelessness and unemployment for veterans, Meeks said. One third of all homeless are veterans and more than 70 percent suffer from drug abuse.

Meeks said the average person can help veterans by contributing to the Wounded Warrior project, which helps veterans adjust to civilian life. He said the USO helps with veteran loans and financial support for families.

"Paralyzed Veterans of America provides job training and education to veterans that sacrificed their freedoms for ours," Meeks said.

People can volunteer their services at the Malcom Randall Veterans Administration Hospital in Gainesville, or contact the local Veterans Service Officer to help local veterans, or work with the local D.A.V. to volunteer with transportation.

Meeks said people can make a simple gesture to recognize veterans. They can walk up to a veteran to thank them for their service to the country.

"Thank our veterans; a simple thank you! Meeks said. "We often take for granted the ones that most deserve our gratitude – our veterans."

Memorial Day was begun three years after the Civil War ended on May 5, 1868. Cities in the north and south claim Memorial Day started in their towns.

One of the earliest springtime celebrations of the war dead occurred in Columbus, Miss. on April 1866 when a group of women were decorating the graves of Confederate soldiers and noticed the graves of the Union dead were bare of flowers. Disturbed by the sight, the ladies laid flowers on the graves of the Union dead as well.

The celebration of the war dead in Columbus, Miss. is thought to be the earliest celebration of what was originally called Decoration Day. The U.S. Congress declared Waterloo, N.Y. as the official home of Memorial Day on May 5, 1866.

Dick Mudd, Sharon Sheldon, Arlene Lang and Anna Elkins raise the American Flag as part of the Memorial Day Ceremony at Rosemary Cemetery in Bronson. *Photo by Terry Witt.*