HONORING AMERICA'S VETERANS

2024 PHOENIX VETERANS DAY PARADE

Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans,
Sacrifice Remembered.

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Honoring America's VETERANS

We host honor and recognition events to salute our veterans and their loved ones by thanking, honoring, and recognizing them for their service and patriotism to our country.

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www.HonoringAmericasVeterans.org

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Honoring America's Veterans

Origins of Veterans Day

World War I, also known as "The Great War," was fought from 1914 to 1918. During this conflict, Great Britain, France, Russia, Belgium, Italy, Japan, the United States and other countries, which formed the "Allies," defeated the so-called "Central Powers," which included Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria. On the "eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month" of 1918, German leaders signed an armistice, or a temporary ending to hostilities, with the Allied powers. On that date, November 11, celebrations were held in New York City, Paris, London and in other cities around the globe. The following year, President Woodrow Wilson declared November 11 as "Armistice Day," a day to observe the ending of World War I.

On June 4, 1926, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution asking President Calvin Coolidge to call upon officials to "display the flag of the United States on all government buildings on November 11 and inviting the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches, or other suitable places, with appropriate ceremonies of friendly relations with all other peoples." Twelve years later, on May 13, 1938, Congress passed an Act making the 11th of November Armistice Day, a federal holiday.

Initially, Armistice Day was to be a day to honor veterans of World War I. But following the tremendous calls to arms and human sacrifice during World War II and the Korean conflict, veterans groups urged Congress to consider a day to celebrate U.S. veterans of all wars. On June 1, 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill changing Armistice Day to Veterans Day.

Difference between Veterans Day and Memorial Day

Veterans Day in the United States is a day to honor all Americans who have served in the U.S. military, both during wartime and in peacetime. Memorial Day is a day for remembering and honoring Americans who have died serving the nation, especially those who died in battle or from wounds received during armed conflicts. On Veterans Day, Americans thank the living veterans for their service to the country and recognize that all who have served the country, not just those who have died, have made sacrifices and done their duty.

Celebrity Grand Marshal

Luis Gonzalez

Arizona Diamondbacks Senior Advisor to the President & CEO

One of the most popular figures in Arizona Diamondbacks history because of the way he interacted with fans and his game-winning single in Game 7 of the 2001 World Series to give the organization its first world championship, Luis Gonzalez is in his 14th full season in the front office and ninth as Senior Advisor to the President, CEO, and General Partner with the D-backs. Gonzalez rejoined the organization in August 2009 after officially retiring as a player following his 19-year Major League career.

In his role, Gonzalez assists D-backs President, CEO, and General Partner Derrick Hall and other departments throughout the baseball and business side of the organization. He also continues to impact the community with the Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation, interacts with season ticket holders at special events, meets with corporate partners, fills in on the D-backs' radio and television broadcasts and spends time with Major and Minor League players throughout the organization. Gonzalez also interacts with children at the team's D-backs Baseball Academy camps and participates in the annual week-long Fantasy Camp.

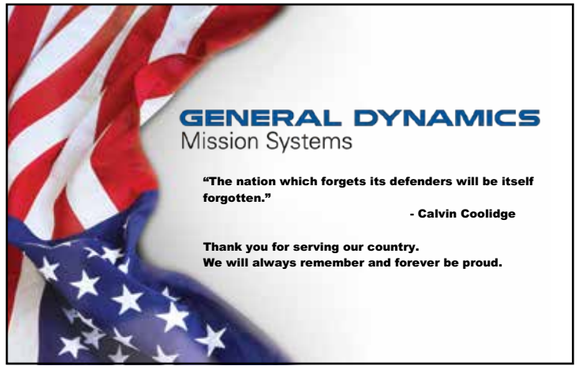
For his contributions as a player and a member in the community, Gonzalez became the first former player to have his number retired by the D-backs on Aug. 7, 2010. His No. 20 jersey can now be seen in five-foot purple numbers on the right field façade at Chase Field next to Jackie Robinson's No. 42, which was retired in perpetuity by Major League Baseball on April 15, 1997, and Randy Johnson's No. 51, which was retired in 2015.

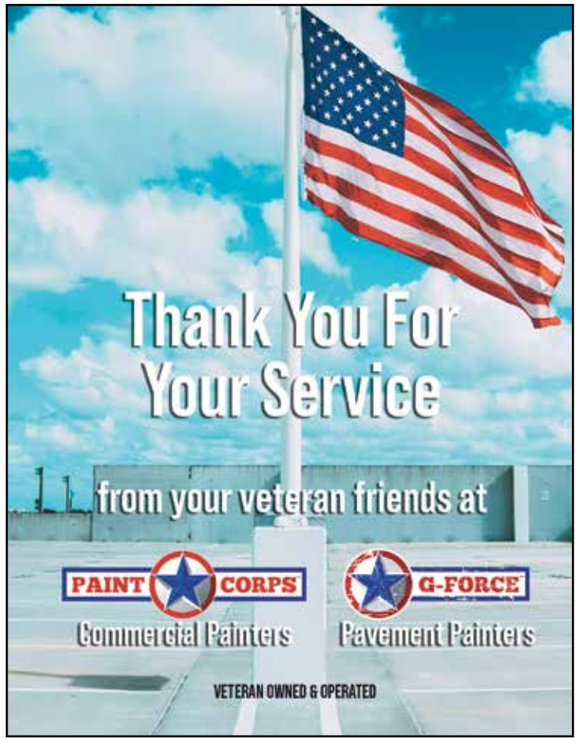
Gonzalez focuses many of his community efforts on the men and women who risk their lives every day to ensure our safety through his Gonzo's Hometown Heroes Fund. All of the fund's proceeds will benefit projects, programs, and nonprofit organizations that support police officers, firefighters, and first responders across Arizona. His "Going Gonzo for Kids" initiative through the Arizona Diamondbacks Foundation contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars from 2010-17 to a variety of Arizona-based children's charities.

Gonzalez was a two-time D-backs nominee for the prestigious Roberto Clemente Award (2000 and 2003). Each year, the team gives out the Luis Gonzalez Award to the D-backs player who best exemplifies the talents, spirit and heart of the D-backs legend both on and off the field, as voted by his teammates, coaches and staff members. The team also presents a corporate partner each year with the Luis Gonzalez Community Champion Award for its efforts in giving back to the community.

He and his wife, Christine, reside in Scottsdale, Ariz., and have triplets Megan, Alyssa, and Jacob, the Giants' second-round pick (58th overall) in the June 2017 draft. ■

Honoring America's VETERANS





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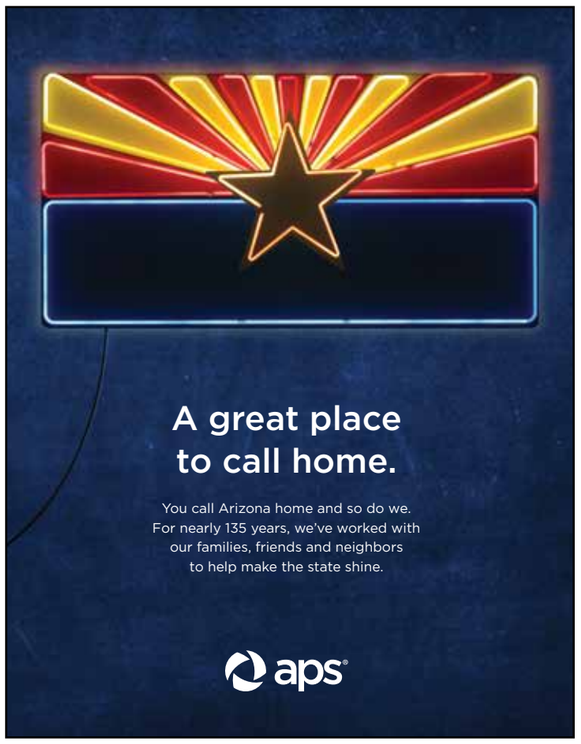

World War II Veteran Grand Marshal

William "Bill" Keim

U.S. Merchant Marines

"I want to let the public about the part the Merchant Marines played in the successful conclusion of World War II. The Battle of the North Atlantic was the longest and deadliest battle of WWII and lasted five years, cost 1,500 ships and the lives of 72,000 men of all nations. Over time, the knowledge of WWII and the sacrifices made are being lost to younger generations. Being Grand Marshal is an honor and a reminder to everyone about the severity of war."

William "Bill" Keim joined the U.S. Merchant Marines at 17, in 1943. After training at Sheepshead Bay, N.Y., he shipped out of San Francisco to Pearl Harbor, where he worked as an oiler in the engine room, and brought food, arms and ammunition to troops. He spent over a year in the Battle of the Atlantic, where he was awarded the Convoy Cup Medal for service in an active war zone.

Bill is proud of serving his country during WWII, and felt it was a privilege and duty to protect his country and the American way of life.

In 2024, Bill was invited to Washington D.C. to be the sole representative of the U.S. Merchant Marines (USMM) on a float in the Memorial Day Parade.

Bill was president of the Desert Mariners, a group of USMM vets, for about seven years in Phoenix. He took part in an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. several years ago and in return, spoke at fundraisers for the organization. He's spoken at American Express, Intel, schools, and did talks over Zoom during Covid. He's an honorary member of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A., American Merchant Marine Veterans and a 32nd Degree Mason.

After being discharged in 1946 as a Junior Engineer, Bill returned to St. Louis to marry Hazel Leimbach. He worked as a draftsman. a fabrication pipe salesman and a mechanical contractor.

In 1963, he was hired as a financier for new construction in Arizona. He was president of Turf Irrigation and Waterworks Co. until his retirement in 1990. Being bored, he worked for Backflow Prevention as a salesman until he turned 85 then retired again.

Bill received many service medals and ribbons for sailing in different areas, the Convoy Cup Medal for service under combat (awarded jointly by Canada and Norway), and his greatest treasure, the Congressional Gold Medal, awarded to all USMM veterans as a belated thank you and acknowledgement of service. He proudly wears it during veterans' events. ■

Honoring America's VETERANS

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Korean War Veteran Grand Marshal

William "Bill" Merdick

U.S. Navy

"Although I never saw combat, I am extremely honored to represent the Navy veterans of the Korean War, especially those who saw combat and those who lost their lives."

William "Bill" Merdick is a native Arizonan. Bill has a love for God and pride for his country. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy to serve his country in 1951, and he married his high school sweetheart, Linda, in 1952.

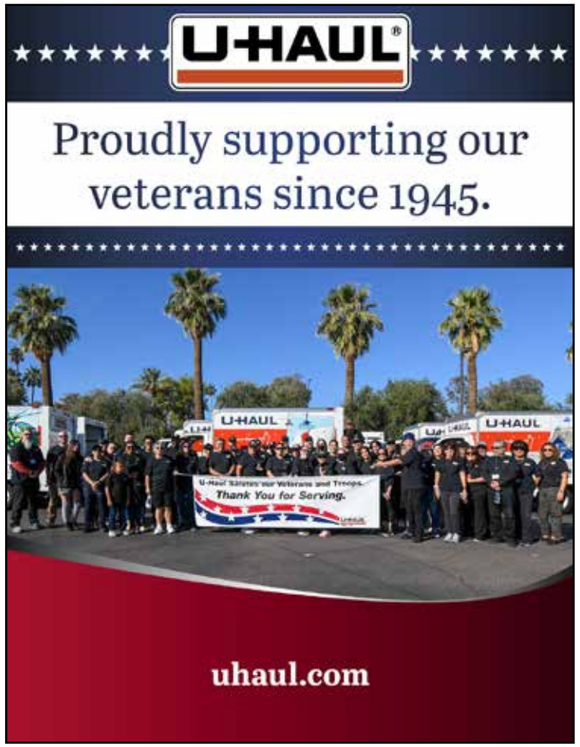
Bill was stationed at the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Headquarters in Norfolk, Va. and was a Yeoman Third Class. During the Korean War, he had top secret clearance for the United States because of the material that he was handling and he also had NATO cosmic top secret clearance, which required an extensive FBI background check. There were officers present from several NATO countries who would write war plans out in longhand and then a half dozen yeoman would type up the official plans to give back to the officers. The officer in charge was always an Admiral from the U.S. Navy, who was the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic.

After he was released from active duty in 1954, Bill moved back to Arizona and became an engineer for a telephone company. Bill and Linda started a family and bought a piece of land for farming and created a family legacy home. Bill and Linda were married for 59 years before she went home to heaven. He has three sons, two daughters-in-laws, four grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

His granddaughter described Bill as not just a veteran, but he is a man of godly character, compassion, wisdom, resilience and is tough as nails! He will inconvenience himself to help another person. When she was diagnosed with cancer and in the hospital, Bill was also in the hospital for heart surgery. After they were both discharged to return home, he pushed through whatever pain or healing he was going through to take care of her.

His granddaughter said Bill never gives up and he keeps pushing forward. She thanks her grandpa, and all those who serve this country because without their resilience and sacrifice, there would be no freedom. ■

Honoring America's VETERANS

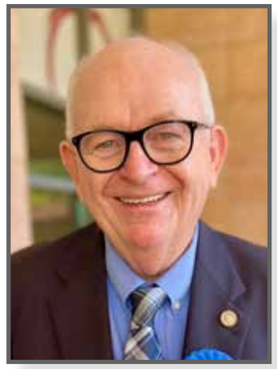


Vietnam War Veteran Grand Marshal

David J. Hunt

U.S. Army and U.S. Coast Guard Reserves

"I feel honored, humbled and surprised to be selected as a Grand Marshal to represent the Vietnam era. I feel that there would be many veterans that would be more deserving than me."

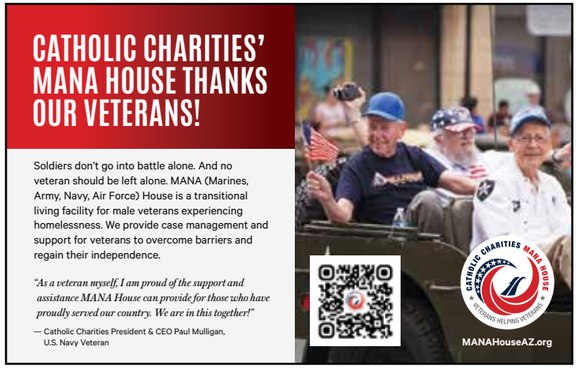


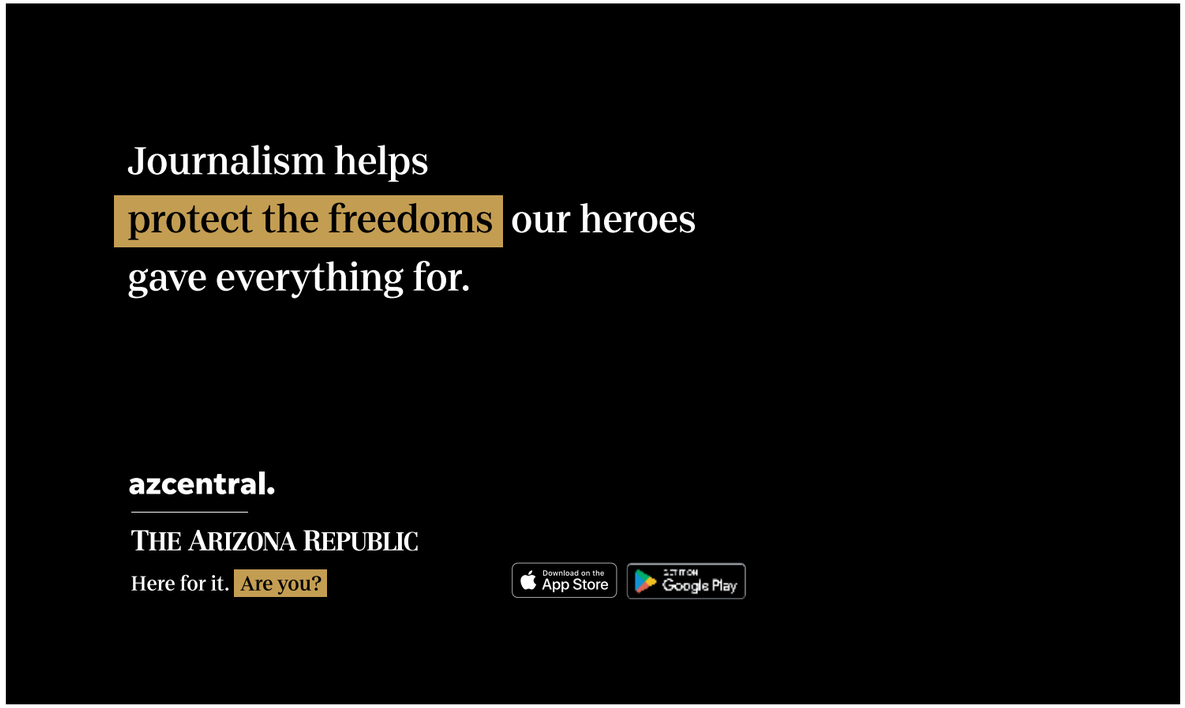
David J Hunt was drafted into the U.S. Army in October 1966. After jump school, he was assigned to the 82nd ABN Division at Fort Bragg, N.C. He was later transferred to the 101st ABN Division and was deployed with A Co, 1/502 Infantry 101st ABN in 1967.

David was wounded in 1968. After getting out of the hospital, he was sent back to the states and was discharged from active duty at Fort Lewis, Wash.

In 1982, he enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserves where he served in post security. In 1985, he transferred to the Army Reserves. He became an Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID) agent in the reserves and attended Warrant Officer School.

In 2003, David was activated with his unit the 307th MP. Det. (CID) and deployed to Iraq and Kuwait. He later was transferred to the Active Guard Reserve and sent back to the states to help set up a new Army reserve CID unit in Phoenix, the 225 MP Det. (CID). He served as the commander and operations officer until he retired from the Army reserve as a Chief Warrant Officer 4, on Feb. 1, 2008. ■





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Cold War Veteran Grand Marshal

Nancy Fassbender

Army National Guard

"It is my honor to be selected to be the Grand Marshal for the Phoenix Veterans Day parade. My mission is to thank all the veterans and especially welcome home the Vietnam veterans. Because of them, the Department of Defense changed the military and understood they needed updated equipment, and uniforms that would be for the environment that they had to be in. I also want the children to understand what it takes to cherish and enjoy their freedom. That is why I include children in my events. I want them to be able to meet and thank a veteran."

Nancy Fassbender joined the Army National Guard in 1975. She was a helicopter mechanic and worked on Huey helicopters. She was honorably discharged in 1978 as an E4.

She is a former board member and historian for the Pinal County Veterans Memorial Foundation. She is the author of the book, "My Fallen Hero."

Nancy is an honorary member of East Valley POW Chapter and a member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart chapter 2560.

Nancy has done many veterans events in the Valley. This is her fourth year with Wreaths Across America for honoring interred veterans in the East Valley at Mountain View Cemetery in Mesa.

In 2020, she was inducted into the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame Society. Only one-tenth of 1% of veterans in Arizona receive this high honor. She is currently serving as a board director to the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame Society Board.

For the past six years, Nancy has served as an active member and ambassador of the Apache Junction Area Chamber of Commerce. She enjoys networking with other companies as well as being an ambassador, spreading the word about the Apache Junction/Gold Canyon community. In October, Nancy was awarded the 2022 Community Cup award for her volunteerism in making a difference in her community.

Nancy has made it her mission to thank Vietnam veterans and welcome them home. She has done over 100 pinning ceremonies since she started four years ago. In 2023, Nancy was asked by the Department of Defense to organize a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans celebration, which drew about 1,800 people. At the ceremony, she was honored with the Quilt of Valor.

In 2023, she also was honored by the Daughters of the American Revolution and was presented the Community Service Award.

In March 2024, the USA Vietnam War Commemoration invited Nancy to represent Arizona and lay a wreath at the Wall in Washington, DC.

In May 2024, Nancy was selected to be one of the Mesa Hometown Heroes. Her banner was hung on Main Street by Country Club Boulevard. ■

Desert Storm Grand Marshal

Thomas Kendra

U.S. Army

"Being nominated for Grand Marshal is a humbling experience, but being chosen to reflect the best of the soldiers I served with in the Persian Gulf is an honor."

Enlisting in the military had a profound impact on shaping Thomas Kendra's identity. With his parent's permission at the age of 17, he joined the U.S. Army to become an infantry soldier. His journey began in 1987, and he soon found himself 900 miles away from home, starting a completely new way of life.

Basic training was a pivotal period during which Thomas gained confidence, surpassed his previous limitations, honed basic leadership skills, and developed effective communication skills.

His first regular duty station was with the 101st Airborne Division where he served as an assistant gunner for a 60mm mortar squad. Over time, he progressed to become the squad leader of the same mortar squad.

As a member of B Company 3/327th Infantry, Thomas participated in special company training courses at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. and the Northern Warfare Training Center at Fort Greely, Alaska. His unit frequently acted as opposing forces for the Mechanized Infantry that trained at Fort Knox, Ky. He attended the Air Assault School, Combat Lifesavers Course and Primary Leadership Development Course.

On Aug. 12, 1991, Thomas was discharged from active duty as an Infantry Squad Leader just 10 days after Iraq forces invaded Kuwait, his unit was one of the first to have boots on the ground in Saudi Arabia. Thomas said they completed their mission as part of the 18th Airborne Corp with great success and minimal casualties.

Thomas was honored to receive the Combat Infantry Badge, Army Good Conduct Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon, Army Achievement Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal with two brass service stars, Expert Rifle and Mortar Badges.

Thomas considers himself fortunate to have been a soldier. Not many people can say that they've had a tank roll over them, thrown hand grenades, operated million-dollar weapon systems, flown in helicopters just feet above the tree line, banked through canyons, rappelled down buildings and out of helicopters, navigated miles of rugged terrain with just a compass and a topographical map, jumped sand dunes in a foreign country in a military Humvee, and known the camaraderie that soldiers share. ■

Operation Iraqi Freedom
Veteran Grand Marshal

James Wolfenden

U.S. Marine Corps

"To me, accepting this nomination to be a Grand Marshal is for my brothers who lost their lives fighting for our freedom and way of life. I try to live my life in a way that honors them, and this is one of the ways I feel I can do that. I want the memory of the warriors from OIF and every other conflict to be remembered."

James Wolfenden has a long history of serving his country and community. After graduating from Prescott High School, he worked as a wildland firefighter for the Prescott Fire Department (later known as Granite Mountain Hotshots) before joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 2003.

James was passionate about serving after 9/11. During his time in the Marines, he served in multiple combat deployments to Fallujah and other hot spots during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He received numerous combat-related awards and accolades and was injured during combat operations. He served in 3rd Bn 4th Marines and 1st Bn 5th Marines. He also served as a professional marksmanship instructor and a recruiter in New York City. He was honorably discharged after more than eight years of service with a rank of Sergeant.

Following his military career, James became a police officer with both the Tucson and Phoenix police departments, earning recognition for his service before being medically retired after being severely injured on duty in 2017. He served in multiple duties while a police officer, including undercover operations, fugitive apprehension and neighborhood crimes.

James owns a painting company, Paint Corps. of Phoenix North, and serves as the director of sales for Copper State Pavement. In his free time, James coaches football at Brophy College Preparatory, enjoys outdoor activities and traveling with his family.

James is dedicated to helping veterans and first responders. He is working to launch a non-profit organization, Make Ready. This new organization will provide support for those who have experienced traumatic experiences return to normal life and assist with employment transitions once their service has ended. He is a proud father to his children, Brody and Brooklyn, and husband to Dina Wolfenden. ■

Operation Enduring Freedom
Veteran Grand Marshal

Rosa Linda Regalado

U.S. Navy and U.S. Army

"It is an honor to be chosen as the Grand Marshal for my era of conflict, particularly as a woman who served in the Afghanistan War. This recognition highlights that women can make significant contributions and drive change for future generations of women in upcoming conflicts."

Retired Staff Sgt. Rosa Linda Regalado was born and raised in a tiny town, Manzanola, Colorado, with a population of about 300 people.

Her uncle, Juan Martinez, served in the U.S. Army and was her idol. As a young little girl, she remembers watching commercials about the U.S. Navy and telling her mother that she wanted to be a pilot and fly planes so she could save people. After graduating high school, Rosa Linda joined the military in 1999. She was the only female in her family to join the U.S. Navy.

Among the jobs she held were operations specialist, medical operations and automated logistics specialist. She completed three combat tours in the U.S Navy and six combat tours in the U.S. Army. Throughout her career, she traveled all over the world and trained with various armed forces of other countries.

Rosa Linda has a 15-year-old daughter and a 21-year-old son, who is serving in the U.S. Navy as an aircraft electrician stationed in Guam.

During her service, she endured many injuries during combat. The military taught her to be strong, be proud and be determined at anything she accomplishes in life. She served with pride and wants to provide great strength to those women who continue to serve.

While on active duty, she earned two college degrees: an associate of arts in dental assisting and a bachelor's degree in community programs support services from the University of Phoenix.

After retiring from the service in 2008 as a Staff Sergeant (SSG), Rosa Linda has continued to work in the medical and dental field. She also has been a volunteer basketball coach for young teenage girls in Fountain, Colorado.

Rosa Linda now works as a dental assistant and financial coordinator in Chandler. She is training to compete in bodybuilding and is enjoying life with her daughter and two dogs. ■

Parade Entries

Phoenix Veterans Day Parade

1. Heroes Flag carried by Team Red, White and Blue
2. 108th Army National Guard Band
3. Spencers TV and Appliance is proud to support our nation's veterans with a special sale today, supporting Honoring America's Veterans. Learn more at SpencersTV.com
4. Arizona Twirling Athletes Show Corps
5. TriWest Healthcare Alliance - Honored to Serve and Welcome Home Our Nation's Vietnam Veterans
6. Celebrity Grand Marshal, Baseball Legend Luis Gonzalez riding with the Sun Country Model T Car Club
7. Dignitaries of the HAV Phoenix Veterans Day Parade
8. USAA
9. University of Phoenix Employee Resource Group proudly carries their Eagle logo balloon
10. The 2024 Veterans Grand Marshals are World War II Veteran William Keim, Korean War Veteran Bill Merdick, Vietnam War Veteran David Hunt, Cold War Veteran Nancy Fassbender, Desert Storm Veteran Thomas Kendra, Operation Enduring Freedom Veteran Rosa Regaldo, and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran James Wofenden. They ride in the beautiful classic cars the Sun Country Model T. Car Club provides.
11. Basha High School Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
12. The Puma Regiment High School Band from Chandler, Arizona
13. Phoenix Police Dept
14. Maricopa County Attorney's Office
15. Essay Winners Daniel Scripter, Daniel Beard, Olivia Fray and Wendy Soto are riding in the Hall of Flame Firetruck from the Museum of Firefighting
16. Joseph P Schwan 82nd Airborne chapter
17. Arizona Military World War II, Historical Society
18. U-Haul
19. The American Legion Pat Tillman Post 117 Family
20. Third Marine Division of Arizona
21. Banner Plans & Networks, Noble is the Sacrifice
22. Marine Corps League Ira Hayes Detachment 002, Honoring our Vietnam Veterans
23. The American Legion Thunderbird Tony F. Soza-Ray Martinez Post 41 Phoenix
24. Arizona State University Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps Color Guard
25. Arizona Public Service and Palo Verde Generating Station Honor Guard
26. Valley Firefighters Veteran Society (FireVet)
27. Sun City Poms
28. Bank of America
29. The American Legion Post 5 Laveen, present Batman and Catwoman
30. Mountain Ridge High School, Pride of the West Marching Band
31. Waymo Veterans @ Waymo Employee Resource Group
32. Glam Squad Prom and Pageant
33. G-FORCE Parking Lot Striping and Paint Corps with Submariner Veteran Freddy Alvarez
34. Lt. Frank Luke Jr. Memorial Museum and the Blue Star Moms
35. The WOW Factor and Sierrah Broadcasting
36. Phoenix Elks Lodge 335
37. Catholic Charities MANA House
38. Thunderbird High School Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Program
39. The American Legion Luke Greenway Post 1
40. Humana
41. The American Legion Post 65, Travis L. Williams
42. Aetna Medicare Solutions
43. US Customs and Border Protection
44. Warriors at Amazon
45. National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution; Camelback Chapter, Sons and Children of the American Revolution, Maricopa Chapter,
46. Operation Restoring Veterans Hope supported by Magical Marketing
47. Moon Valley High School Marching Band
48. Infinity Hospice Care
49. Prisoner of War, Missing in Action and Killed in Action Honor Guard
50. Honoring America's Veterans Eagle
51. SERVE at PetSmart
52. Grand Canyon German Shepard Dog Club and Saving Paws Rescue AZ
53. Arizona Rangers
54. United States Marshal Posse District of Arizona
55. Maricopa County Sheriff's Office
56. Tender Little Hearts Mini Tales and Equine Assisted Services
57. Franklin Police and Fire High School Sergeant Rock Club
58. Law Tigers – America's Motorcycle Lawyers
59. Perch Base Submarine
50. Arizona Silent Wings and World War II Chaplains
61. Western States Carpenters Union 1912
62. Grand Canyon University (GCU) Army ROTC
63. JP Morgan Chase is Proud to Support Our Veterans
64. Military Support Foundation sponsoring the Filipino American National Historical Society, The Fallen Soldiers
65. GoDaddy
66. United States Navy and Marine Corps Unit of Arizona
67. Free and Accepted Masons of Arizona
68. Arizona Military Vehicles Collectors Club
69. Opendoor Veterans Employee Resource Group, A Hero's Journey Leads Home
70. Jewish War Veterans, Department of the Southwest
71. Phoenix VA Health Care System
72. Cigna Healthcare
73. Society of the Third Infantry Division, U.S. Army, Renegade Outpost #15
74. Carl's Jr. (StarCorp, LLC)
75. U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps - Phoenix Division
76. USAF Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol Squadron 302
77. White Mountain Marching Band
78. Sun Country Corvette Club
79. Arizona Patriot Guard Riders
80. Legendary Bomb Club
81. Arizona Military Vehicles Collectors Club
82. Proud to Be a Marine
83. Proud to Be An American
84. Honoring America's Veterans Military Sphere balloons close out the parade, and in doing so, we wish you a Happy Veterans Day!

Essay Winner

Daniel Scripter

9th Grade | San Tan Charter

Teacher: Talia Polk

Welcome Home, Vietnam Veterans

I interviewed my grandfather, Robert Scripter, a Vietnam veteran. From February 1970 until December 1971, he served in the U.S. Army with his last rank as Sergeant E5, Military Occupation Series (MOS) Code 11B40 light weapons infantry.

He received an Honorable Discharge, a Bronze Star medal, a Combat Infantryman badge, a Vietnam Campaign medal, and a Vietnam Service medal. For the first three months while in Vietnam, he was part of the 25th Infantry Division. He was involved with various missions west of Saigon, along the Cambodian border, in an area called Elephant's Ear. He did clearing and sweeping of small villages, clearing the Michelin Rubber Plantation with a company-size unit of U.S. tanks while checking and searching routes from the Ho Chi Minh trail. He was a point man, radio man, and squad leader.

For the last nine months, he was in the 23rd Infantry Division, also known as the Americal Division. At that time, he was involved with various missions south of the demilitarized zone, west of Da Nang, along the Laos border. He did the clearing and sweeping of small villages and guarded evacuation routes of the Khe Sahn U.S. base. He also did rescue missions for downed U.S. helicopters, etc. His duties were as a M60 machine gun squad leader and platoon leader.

When he returned to the U.S. from Vietnam, he was stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado, as a communications chief for a company of Armored Personnel Carriers. He assigned specialists to do communication management on the Armored Personnel Carriers.

My grandpa said when he returned home, it was a very sad reception received by veterans from most U.S. citizens everywhere. There was no respect for soldiers, and they were treated very poorly. The U.S. and world news organizations reported the worst stories possible in newspapers and on television. There were very few job opportunities available to them. He said it was a very unpopular war; our soldiers were thought of as baby killers and drug addicts. He remembers some soldiers would change out of their uniforms when traveling home to avoid being recognized at airports and train stations.

Today, he said the American military veteran is treated well, even the old Vietnam veterans like himself. He said it seemed to be a long time coming, and now the veterans are shown much respect and are usually greeted with, "Thank you for your service." He said he is sure that no matter what happened back then or now, U.S. veterans would still do what they had to do for the love of their country, families, and our freedom. ■

Essay Winner

Daniel Beard

10th Grade | The Inspiration Academy

Teacher: Lisa Ristuccia

Compassion for Those Who Faced Savagery

President Obama once addressed Vietnam veterans, saying, "You were often blamed for a war you didn't start when you should have been commended for serving your country with valor. You came home and sometimes were denigrated when you should have been celebrated."

Men in the Vietnam War were commanded to do horrible things to the citizens of Vietnam, leading to most being haunted by the things they had done. What makes this more sad is the fact that some of the U.S. soldiers did not choose to be a part of this war and instead were drafted or had little choice of education outside of the military and were motivated by that incentive. The soldiers' training leading up to the war was vigorous and demeaning, and it caused people to lose the sense of who they were before they even enlisted.

More than three million people died in the war, and 58,000 U.S. soldiers were a part of that three million. Over 22,000 U.S. Vietnam veterans died by suicide after the war, which is nearly half of the number of those who died in combat. The vicious things acted out throughout the war left U.S. and Vietnamese citizens and soldiers dead and mentally or physically damaged for senseless reasons.

The harm that was done to the U.S. soldiers, both tangible and intangible, is unforgivable. The things that the soldiers went through led to multiple outcomes, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, guilt, depression, and injuries such as missing limbs, scars, and more. These things have made their everyday lives much more difficult.

The Vietnam War, a war that should have never happened, left lasting scars on our world. The people on the ground were part of terrible and horrible acts that will never be forgotten. The reception U.S. soldiers got when they came home was unfair and misdirected. We should remember them and their survival through the evil situation they were put in. These were young, naive men who ended up paying a price with their lives and minds. They were stripped of their individuality only to come home and be held individually responsible for actions of war. It's easy to place blame our neighbors for our leaders' actions. Instead let's help our veteran soldiers know that we see them as those that faced the ugliness of humanity, so we didn't have to. ■

Essay Winner

Olivia Fray

11th Grade | Centennial High School

Teacher: Kate Menasco

Dear Vietnam Veterans,

Please let me have the chance to give you the welcome home you deserve. The one where you are congratulated and appreciated for your service. The one where you can feel proud of all you did for your country. The one where you are cheered for and celebrated.

Welcome home, veterans, You are heroes. You fought for your country and made us all proud. You survived the horrors and now it is our turn to bring you in with open arms. We see you, we hear you, and we love you. You inspire us, for the challenges you faced, the adversity you overcame, and for the hard work you put in.

Welcome home, veterans, Allow us to give you a space where you can relax. Allow us to give you a space where you know you belong. Allow us to give you a space where you never have to be ashamed. You do not have to be ashamed.

Welcome home, veterans., You are some of the bravest people on the face of the Earth. You have proven time and time again just how strong and resilient you all are. You protected your country. You protected your people. Now it is our turn to repay you.

Welcome home, veterans. Kick up your feet and bask in your own greatness. You are extraordinary, and you are allowed to show it off. Virtuous, exceptional, tactful, earnest, reliable, admirable, noble, these are the words that describe veterans.

Welcome home, veterans. You do not have to worry any longer. We have your back. We are here for you. If you are hurt, we will help you. We will support you all the way to your recovery. We are forever in your debt and will be happy to oblige whatever you need.

Welcome home, veterans, Hold your head up high. Be proud of all you have done. We will be proud with you. You did right by your country. You did right by your home. It would take ten thousand lifetimes to repay you for all you did for this country. We see you and we are eternally grateful for all the sacrifice you made to protect us and this country while you were serving.

Sincerely,

Olivia Fray ■

Essay Winner

Wendy Soto

12th Grade | Maryville High School

Teacher: Michelle Wagner

Honoring Veterans

"There are no unwounded soldiers in war." These words by José Narosky echo the deep scars carried by soldiers after the war ended. Vietnam War veterans experienced one unique experience during and after the war compared to anybody else. The Vietnam War which involved fighting between North and South Vietnam. The United States supported South Vietnam to halt the spread of communism for the period between 1955-1975. These veterans should be celebrated because of their first-hand experience with courage, strength, and suffering during and after the war.

The Vietnam War was one of the longest and most controversial wars in American history. This means that intervention on the part of the United States was motivated from the standpoint of it being the "principle" to intervene, which would be aimed at stopping the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia. More than 2.7 million Americans served in Vietnam, many of them through draft inductions. It was hard in Vietnam with the guerrilla, relief, and tropics, making every day in the life of a soldier problematic. Some got injured, while some remained with psychological traumas from the combat. The people's opinion was mounting against the war, even in the U.S., causing protests against any further opposition. On returning home after their missions, most veterans were received with hostility, and little support had afforded them, further harming the problems experienced by these military personnel in the battlefield (Britannica Kids).

Honoring the veterans of the Vietnam War means realizing their sacrifices not only in battle but even many years after the war has been over. Post-traumatic stress disorder is obvious in many of these veterans who came back with physical wounds and emotional scars. The political climate of the war was such that little respect could be paid to these soldiers. Now, as we look back into their sacrifices, the bravery of these men and the price that they had to pay for serving their country must be recognized.

In conclusion, the courage and sacrifices made on and off the battlefield by Vietnam War veterans should be remembered. Such priceless service for the nation against the challenge that they had to face during and after the war can never be minimized. Their character was just one of many constant reminders of what kind of war really comes at a cost and a sacrifice. ■

Thank You!

To the board of Honoring America's Veterans, including President Dale Villani, Vice President Steve Simpson, Secretary Chris Mahon, Treasurer Carter Dowdy, and board directors Tom Callinan, Jeff Devore, Amanda Walstrom, Selina Lamley, and Bill Pedene. Your tireless support has been instrumental in helping us to honor and recognize our veterans. Thank you for volunteering your time and energy to support our nonprofit.

To the Phoenix Veterans Day Parade Team:

- Staging: Gail Chapman, Hamilton Murray, and Veronica Cavallero
- De-Staging: Stuart Burns
- Logistics: Terra Toc, Kevin Contreas and
- Emcee: Ilene Thompson, KTAR Radio
- Parade Essays: Tom Callinan, Rosy Muftikian, Elizabeth Paules
- Bands: Marshall Pratt
- C2: Carter Dowdy and Matthew Burton
- VIP Area: Ben Hartley, Wendy Swick
- Volunteers: Pamela Castro
- Photography: Bill Pedene, Christine Farmer, Michelle Breese and Roy Meely
- Writer/Editor Support: Lori Baker
- Veterans Grand Marshals: Carlos Lozano
- Public Relations Support Volunteers: Rachel Clifford, Morgan Raye, and Halle Sweeter from 10to1PR

Our team works throughout the year to put on this spectacular event. Our purpose is to commemorate, educate, and demonstrate to our community the vital role of America's veterans in safeguarding this nation and honoring and recognizing those serving our country through military service.

And we'd like to give a shout-out to:

- Our wonderful sponsors who support us
- The parade entries that make the parade come to life

We thank you for building a patriotic spirit in our community.

Happy Veterans Day!

Paula Pedene, Parade Coordinator and Executive Director, Honoring America's Veterans

Commemorating Pearl Harbor Day

Join us December 7th, 2024

Join us as we host the Commemorating Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony with a World War II biplane flyover, wreath layings and more!

Time: 10:55 a.m. | Date: Saturday, December 7, 2024 | Place: Wesley Bolin Plaza Stadium, 1700 West Washington, Phoenix

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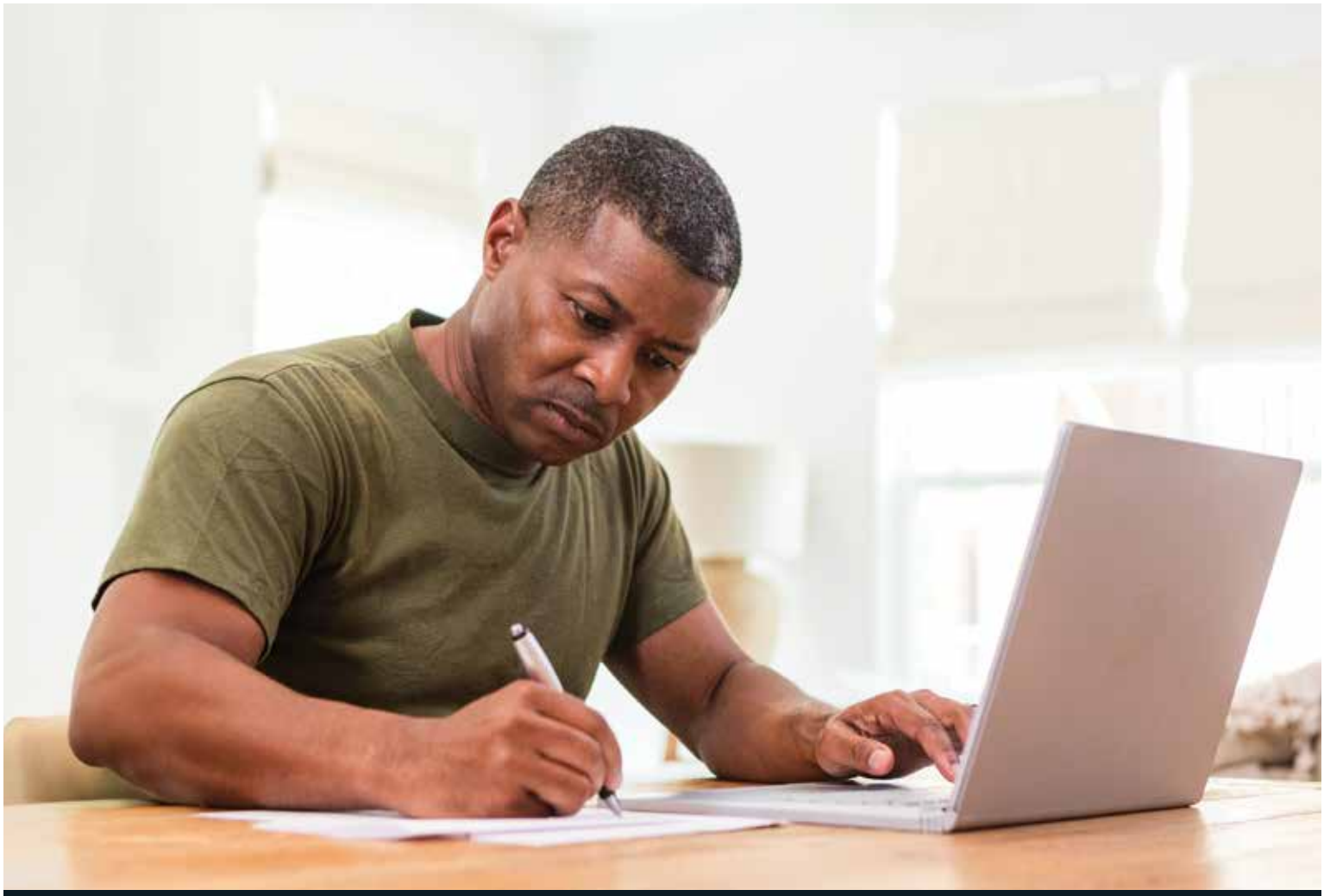

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