



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY STUDENTS, VETERANS FIND COMMON GROUND

Uniontown, PA – This Veterans Day, Fayette County Career & Technical Institute (CTI) students are on a mission to give local veterans all their support – and a little pampering.

Last year, CTI machine production student Loralie Cramer worked with student council advisor and Cosmetology Instructor Cheryl Olson to create the school’s metal poppy project. Red poppies are a nationally recognized symbol of the sacrifices made by U.S. military personnel who served and died for their country.

Students from various classes worked together to manufacture one-inch, metal versions of the iconic flowers as pins or keychains, mounted atop red, white and blue ribbons; and stickers featuring the flower and bearing the phrase, “lest we forget.”

Six months later, Cramer – now in her senior year – joined her fellow CTI students in presenting Fayette County Veteran Affairs Director Brian Bensen a check for more than \$800 – the proceeds from their poppy sales.

“These kids worked so hard, and their donation will be used to directly support our local veteran initiatives, including helping our homeless shelter with supplies. It will also be used toward any veteran emergency that arises,” Bensen said. “The big thing about this for me is that it’s driven by kids. It’s not just one department either – the whole school pulled together to make this happen. These are kids that look up to veterans and appreciate what they did for our country, and I think that says a lot about them, because most teenagers aren’t thinking about our veteran population.”

With a successful first round of fundraising under their belts, the students wanted to keep their momentum going and broaden their community impact.

This week, Olson, along with Barber Instructor Lumont Shannon Jr. and Adult Education Coordinator Maria Lovat, helped students host their first Free Haircuts for Veterans event. In total, nearly 50 local veterans – and a few first responders – received haircuts, facials, manicures and other cosmetology services from talented students.

Shannon said the event was a unique opportunity to witness “cohesiveness” between today’s youth and “people of servitude.”

“It let them see how important it is for our community to bridge the gap that has always been between those facilities. Young people don’t know too much about it, but they were able to tap into this stuff by meeting these people who are still alive and kicking that were participants in wars and had parts in the history we learn about in books,” Shannon said. “I’m all for anything that has to do with community or people in public service, so this is definitely something we want to continue going forward.”

Olson said the event allowed veterans to “relax and enjoy the day,” with some receiving pampering “they’ve never experienced before.”

“We want to inspire the students to make a difference in the community through these projects. We worked together as a school, as a family,” she said. “I would like to see it grow every year and continue as part of a school project that goes on and on – not just for Veterans Day.”

Bensen said the student projects are “pretty awesome,” because they span multiple generations.

“You’ve got kids interacting with Vietnam Veterans, and they get the chance to hear these stories of what things were like for these people. We’re talking maybe 50 years or more between them, but if you think those connections don’t change everyone involved, you’re wrong,” Bensen said. “A lot of veterans still have bad tastes in their mouths because they weren’t given the thanks they deserved after sacrificing a lot for our country, and rightfully so. It’s something as simple as these kids listening to their stories while they’re in the barber’s chair for a haircut that can make a world of difference, because these are generations learning from each other.”

Technologies and Facilities Director Daniel Hoff said the school will continue to manufacture the poppies and find new ways to give back to veterans for years to come. As for the poppy project’s founder, Cramer recently enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. as her post-graduation plan.

“What gets us excited as staff members is seeing our students wanting to take the lead and take the initiative to help out people who have helped our country out,” Technologies and Facilities Director Daniel Hoff said. “It’s really heartwarming to see.”

Keychains remain on sale for \$5; pins for \$3; and stickers for \$1. To purchase these items or for more information about upcoming student events, contact Fayette County CTI at 724-437-2721.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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