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Flagpoles raised in emotional tribute to Chickasha veterans

By Conrad Easterday, Editor
conrad@washitavalleyweekly.com

Kevin and Ginger Blake were sitting in the front yard with a neighbor — a veteran — who told them he would like a flagpole at his home but could not afford the expense. They gathered together family and friends and got the job done.

After experiencing and seeing

the emotions the event evoked, the Moore couple decided to give the same gift to more veterans.

Flagpoles Honoring Our Veterans was created in March 2020. Since then, the volunteer organization has honored 574 veterans, said FHOV Vice President Mike Anthis of Chickasha.

On Sunday, April 28, after a hearty start with breakfast burritos,

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Photo by Conrad Easterday, WVW editor



RIGHT: Chickasha veteran Johnny Lewis (foreground) gets a hug and a handshake from Peter Frullo at the first of 10 flagpole raisings on Sunday, April 28.

Planning key to surviving severe weather events

By Conrad Easterday, Editor
conrad@washitavalleyweekly.com

May and the first two weeks of June are considered storm season in Oklahoma, according to Grady County Emergency Management Director Dale Thompson.

His 26 years of experience responding to severe weather has taught him many things, but the most important has to happen before the first responders arrive.

See 'Weather Prep' Page 2

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Photos by Conrad Easterday, WVV editor

Johnny and Sherri Lewis (immediate right of flagpole) are surrounded by family, friends and members of Flagpoles Honoring Our Veterans, a Moore-based organization that raised nine flagpoles with flags in Chickasha on Sunday, April 28.

Flagpoles'
continued from Page 1

the membership started their motorcycles and added 10 more to the total in Chickasha.

"This is the first time we've ever met in Chickasha," Anthis said.

It's also the first time, the group has raised so many flagpoles at one time. Most of their outings honor three to four veterans.

Each flagpole is erected with a quick setting concrete base and a solar-powered light that veterans don't have to remember to turn on. Solar power also insures utility bills will not increase, however small.

The poles are fitted with nameplates, and the flags are purchased with donated funds from a veteran-owned company, Anthis said. Disabled veterans assemble the flagpoles at the manufacturer.

Once the flagpole is raised and the flag flies over the veteran's home, the banner is lowered and folded into the tri-cornered shape used for storing flags. President Brandon Wallace or founder Kevin Blake will read out the meaning of each of the 13 folds until flag is ready to be presented to the veteran. A round of stories, handshakes, hugs and often tears are exchanged before the riders head off to the next home.

"It's just wonderful," said Sherri Lewis, wife of honored Army veteran Johnny Lewis. "I'm tickled they've come to Chickasha."

When asked which flagpole raisings were most memorable, Anthis said "all of them." Because they are so few, World War II veterans are extra special. Vietnam veterans are fewer too.

"You don't see too many," he noted. "Some of these veterans will just weep with joy. It's the welcome home they never got."

Flagpoles Honoring Our Veterans has 306 veterans on its waiting list currently, which translates as a 10-12 month waiting period. Some of the Red, White and Blue Crew become members after being honored.

The honored veterans include: George Lunquette, Army; Sheriff Gary Boggess, Army; Michael Chavers, Army; Marvin Shipley, Army; Bill Ingraham; Army; Johnny Lewis, Army; Amanda Tolman, Navy; Mayor Zach Grayson, Army; Willard James Guffee, Army. Martin Thorne, Navy.



Roger Nolan (right) and Brandon Wallace, president of FHOV, happily assemble the flagpole at the home of local veteran Johnny Lewis. Donations are important to the group, which has a waiting list of 307.

Go to www.fphov.org to learn more.

'Weather prep'
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"They key word is planning. Have a plan in place ahead of time for your home, work, of you are just driving down the highway," Thompson said. "If you have a safe room, make sure it is clean and stocked, and make sure the stuff you have in your basement or safe room is still fresh."

Stocking a safe room should include a list of common sense items: flashlights, radios, batteries, water, non-persishable food items and first aid kits. Other items are common sense too, but sometimes overlooked, like a five-gallon bucket with kitty litter for a makeshift toilet.

"A lot of people don't think," Thompson said. "Their safe room could be buried by debris, so they need to be stocked for 72 hours, and they should register that safe room so rescuers know to look for them, BUT they should tell friends and family too."

Thompson also suggests keeping important papers such as insurance documents, driver's licenses and medical information, including prescriptions, which they should also stock in their safe room.

"A lot of people don't have a safe room. They need to get to the center part of the house," Thompson advised. "Get as many walls between your family and the weather as possible — unless you're in a mobile home. If you're in a mobile home, get out to anywhere else, and make a plan for where you'll go. Having a plan. That is the key thing for tornadoes, ice storms or any kind of severe weather."

Motorists who get caught in severe weather should be especially alert. There are no public shelters in Grady County other than one in Tuttle that is reserved for residents of that community. Don't ever shelter under a highway overpass. Oklahoma residents have been killed thinking the concrete provides safety when, in fact, it creates dangerous suction.

Employees should ask their supervisors where to shelter and what kind of shelter is available.

Lastly, Grady County residents should stay informed in advance of and during severe weather events, Thompson said. If you don't want to buy a NOAA radio, download any of several apps from local television stations or the National Weather Service to get alerts and real-time updates about the weather on mobile devices. Don't want to add an app? Go to the NWS website. And don't forget that mobile devices need to be charged. Keep extra charging cables in safe rooms or go-bags. Consider a portable charger for refilling batteries if the power goes out.

While May and June are the most dangerous, Thompson said residents should be aware of a "mini" storm season that occurs in September and October.

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