

ERICKSON

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Veterans and the VFW, and his unwavering commitment to his fellow veterans is evident.

Erickson’s selflessness extends beyond his military service. His volunteer efforts include overseeing the flag placement at Munising’s Maple Grove Cemetery and his work with the VFW to ensure veterans’ stories and legacies are preserved.

“I was totally surprised when I was nominated,” Erickson said, recalling how he learned he was a nominee just two weeks before the banquet. “It’s an honor to receive this recognition, but it’s also a tribute to all the other veterans who do so much for our community.”

Burns, who has been at the heart of organizing this annual event, emphasized the importance of recognizing veterans who serve beyond their military duty. “There are a lot of veterans doing great things behind the scenes,” she said. “Volunteers often go unnoticed, and this banquet allows us to bring attention to their selfless contributions.”

The significance of the Alger County Veteran of the Year Award extends beyond the recipients, serving as a reminder of the camaraderie forged through military service. As Burns said, “The military is all about brotherhood and unity. This event brings everyone together, whether they served in Vietnam, the Gulf War or more recent conflicts. It’s our way of saying thank you, while highlighting those whose contributions to community service truly stand out.”

John Dugas, ACVA board member, has been involved with the award program since its inception. He echoed Burns’ sentiment, noting that the veteran community in Alger County, with approximately 10% of the population being veterans, is larger than the national average.

“In our community, veterans are not just a small percentage; they are a major part of who we are,” he said. “This banquet is a celebration of all that they’ve done, and it’s a chance for us to come together and recognize the extraordinary efforts of those who continue to serve.”

The evening was made even more special by the music of the Munising Vanguards and the heartfelt keynote speech by Mike Rondeau. Rondeau, a nurse practitioner at the Veterans Health Administration and a veteran and longtime advocate for fellow service members, spoke passionately about the challenges veterans face and the importance of supporting one another.

Gary Bovan, president of the Munising Bay Cruisers, also played a key role in supporting the event by presenting a \$2,000 check to Mike Dugas, the 2023 Veteran of the Year. The donation, raised through the Munising Bay Car Show, reflects the Bay Cruisers’ commitment to veterans and their dedication to making a difference in veterans’ lives.

Bovan, who has long been an advocate for veterans, said, “This



Scott Mitchell

Becky Burns, Alger County Veterans Service Officer, served as emcee of the Veteran of the Year Community Service Award banquet.

event is something I look forward to every year. The way we honor our veterans is paramount to me, especially since I lost my brother to war. Veterans didn’t always receive the recognition they deserved, but events like this ensure they are never forgotten.”

The event also recognized the contributions of volunteers like Brenda Lindeblad, who helped organize the evening’s logistics. “Volunteering for this event means a lot to me,” Lindeblad said. “My son Marcus served in the Marines for four years, and I want to do my part in honoring those who have served. Our family has a long history of military service. Two of my husband’s brothers served, and I also have nephews in the military. I’m incredibly proud of all their sacrifices.”

Lindeblad also recognized her volunteer team, including returning members Cathy Schierschmidt and Samantha Niemi. “They do great work,” she said. “With new additions like Patty Aho and Susie Steinhoff, who stepped up this year, the team really came together and did an excellent job.”

As Erickson received his award from Mike Dugas, the 2023 recipient, he reflected on the camaraderie and honor of being part of a community that values service.

“It’s not just about me,” Erickson said. “It’s about everyone who serves and continues to serve, and I’m proud to be part of this amazing community.”

For Burns, who was recognized earlier this year as the 2024 Veteran Service Provider of the Year by the State of Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, the event reflects the heart of her work. “It’s not about the awards. It’s about the veterans,” she said. “I’m just lucky to have the best job, working with some of the finest people in our community.”

The Alger County Veteran of the Year Community Service Award banquet honors the sacrifices made by veterans, not only in their service to their country but also in their lasting commitment to the community.

Award recipients like Francis “Sonny” Putvin, Mike Dugas and now Erickson have all devoted themselves to causes that support both veterans and the people of Alger County.

For Erickson, this recognition is well-deserved, yet he remains focused on the work ahead. “I think this is a great program, and I’m proud to be part of it,” he said, looking forward to continuing his service and making an even greater impact in the years to come.

OBITUARIES

Shirley Naomi Olson

Shirley Naomi Olson, age 96, of Munising, died late Sunday morning, Oct. 27, 2024, at her home under the loving care of her family. She was born in Canton, Illinois, on April 1, 1928, to Cameron and Maggie (Skidmore) Denney. Shirley grew up in central Illinois and graduated from Broadview Academy. She attended Andrews University and met Walter Olson in their chemistry class. They were married on Dec. 21, 1952, in Glendale, California. Shirley earned her bachelor’s degree in dietetics at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

In 1956 Walter and Shirley settled in Munising. It did not take long for Shirley to fall in love with the small town, and it became the family’s home. In these early days she was a social butterfly and was involved in many of the social activities the town had to offer, including a women’s golf league. She organized cooking and nutritional classes for the community. She helped Walter with his medical practice, and they were very active in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and School in Munising. Shirley became a full-time mom with the birth of her sons in 1960 and 1962. She was a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother and an organized and immaculate homemaker. She counted many as her friends and was the kind of person who would inadvertently hold up the checkout line at the



grocery store chatting with the clerk or anyone else who was there. A smile for anyone and everyone.

Shirley is survived by her sons and daughters-in-law, Dr. Mark and Rosie Olson and Dr. Kurt and Rondi Olson; and grandchildren, Steven, Natalie, Emily, Eric, Karl, Ryan and Elizabeth. She was preceded in death by her husband, Walter; her sisters, Patsy (Gene) Mason and Mary Lou (Fred) DeVries; and half siblings, Grace, Everett “Deek,” Russell and Austin Denney.

A memorial service will be held at the Munising Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Saturday, Nov. 23, 2024, following the church service, with a potluck luncheon at noon and memorial service to follow at 1:30 p.m.; all are welcome. Graveside service, weather permitting, will be at noon on Sunday, Nov. 24, 2024, at Maple Grove Cemetery. Mrs. Olson’s obituary and online guestbook may be viewed and signed at bowermanfuneralhome.net.

Ernest E. Norberg

Ernest E. Norberg of Mesa, Arizona, passed away at age 87 on Oct. 30, 2024, in Apache Junction, Arizona. He died of dementia after 10 days in a private nursing home. Ernest was born in Chatham on March 23, 1937, to parents Waino and Elsie (Koski) Norberg.

Ernest is survived by his wife of 47 years, Mary, whom he married on Jan. 1, 1977; his children David, Diana and John Norberg; stepchildren Sandy Patten (and husband Doug),

Lester Ludtke (and wife Theresa) and Timothy Ludtke (and wife Lynn); and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents; two sons, Ernest Norberg Jr. and Danny Norberg (both in 1978); his beloved daughter Theresa Norberg Williams (in 2015); and his four brothers: Eugene, Clarence, Raymond and Ken.

A private service is planned for a later date.



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