

NEWS RELEASE

Knights Bring Community Together to Honor Veterans

by LTC retired Ernie Jackson

Honor. Duty. Country. The KofC Assembly #2794 & Council #8086 in Port Orange, FL, held a traditional military-style dinner on November 3 at Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church's Parish Center to honor local veterans for their selfless service to our country. The patriotic event brought more than 330 parishioners and community members – many of whom were either veterans or active duty military – together for a spirited evening of good food and camaraderie. The guests of honor were 10 World War II veterans.

Modeled after the military Dining-Out, a ceremonial tradition in all branches of service, the dinner was steeped in military history and customs, combined with some good old-fashioned fun. The festive event started with a bugle "*mess call*" from parishioner and high school band member Kaely Beagling, followed by the Posting of the Colors by the Embry Riddle University combined arms (Army, Navy and Air Force) Sr. ROTC Color Guard, and the singing of our *National Anthem* by Knight Joseph Cerio. The Pastor of Our Lady of Hope, Fr. Chris Hoffman, gave the invocation and benediction.

Presiding over the dinner was Assembly Navigator John O'Malley (serving as President of the Mess – POM) and Council Grand Knight Jim Waggoner. Former Grand Knight and Air Force veteran Tim Mell served as the Master of Punch – (MOP) for the Council's version of a military Punch Bowl Ceremony. The revelry began when the motley crew of veterans and community

members, dressed as the cast of MASH (1970's TV Sitcom about the Korean War), wheeled in the punch bowl. The grog-like punch was made from a concoction of beverages and other ingredients representing battles and wars in which our Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy and Army veterans proudly served. Knight George Szocs, a lifetime KofC member said, "The ceremony was so riveting that one minute I was laughing and the next I had tears in my eyes."

Once the MOP determined the Punch was "Fit for Consumption," the audience participated in military toast ceremony led by the Master of the Toast – (MOT) SK Jim Waggoner. Toasts were offered to each branch of service, our Creator and military families. A solemn toast was offered by SK Bob Dytkowski to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. These heroes were represented at an empty table set in memory of our Fallen Comrades. SK Jim Waggoner said, "Let us always remember that because of the dedication, perseverance and sacrifice of our military warriors we have the liberty to awake every day in a free country called the United States of America. God Bless our soldiers, men and women. They deserve our unwavering appreciation and gratitude with every breath of our being."

Following the ceremony, everyone enjoyed an authentic Italian spaghetti dinner prepared by SK Knight Al Citro, a long time New York Chef, and his great team of cooks. The meal was served by the Our Lady of Hope Youth Organization. During dinner, Mr. Vice, played by SK Retired Army Lt. Col Ernest Jackson, kept everyone entertained with "Points of Order" and skits that poked fun at inter-service rivalry and roasted a few good-humored guests.

After dinner, the Mayor Donald Burnette of Port Orange thanked the Knights for honoring local veterans, recognizing that they do much for their community. Capt. Patrick Everly, the Navy ROTC Commander at Embry Riddle University and a fellow Knight, delivered an inspiring speech about the sacrifices made by our veterans and those currently serving our country, and how important it is for us to honor them.

The Knights ended the evening by thanking the following community organizations for their help in honoring the veterans: Port Orange Boy Scout Troop 436 for the wonderful table center pieces; Daytona Military Museum for the military displays; and Olive Garden, BJ's, Gaff's Quality Meat, Walmart, Pepsi, Sam's Club, and Gordon's for donations.

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