

## Knights Bring Community Together to Honor Veterans

By LTC retired Ernie Jackson and Debbie Jackson

*With respect, honor and gratitude.* The KofC Assembly #2794 & Council #8086 in Port Orange, FL, brought more than 350 parishioners and community members together November 9 to thank veterans for their selfless service to our country. Held at Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church's Parish Center, the second annual military-style dinner paid tribute to the many local veterans and active duty military, who were among those who enjoyed the spirited evening of good food and camaraderie.

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. This year, the church community was honored to have two special guests attend the event: U.S. Representative Michael Waltz, Florida's 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, and retired Army Brigadier General Ernie Audino, Waltz's District Director.

A combat-decorated Green Beret and steadfast supporter of veterans, Waltz thanked the veterans, and their families, for their patriotic service to our country. The National Guardsman stressed the special bond that veterans share. Noting that, in combat conditions, regardless of age, socioeconomic background or political party, our military never take their eyes off their mission. "Our veterans, like those who serve today, all fight under the same flag to preserve our freedom," said Waltz.

The festive dinner program saluted the veterans. The military tribute began with the traditional bugle *Mess Call*, played by parishioner and high school band member Kaely Beagling; followed by the Posting of the Colors by the Embry Riddle University Combined Arms (Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force) Sr. ROTC Color Guard, and the singing of our *National Anthem* by Knight Joseph Cerio. Our Lady of Hope Pastor, Fr. Chris Hoffman, gave the invocation and benediction.

Assembly Navigator SK John O'Malley (serving as President of the Mess) and Council Grand Knight SK Jim Waggoner presided over the dinner. Former Grand Knight and Air Force veteran SK Tim Mell served as the Master of Punch for the Council's version of a military Punch Bowl ceremony.

The revelry began with 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 made from a concoction of ingredients represented our nation's battles and wars. SK Richie Smatt said, "The ceremony and dinner was such a great way to honor our veterans living with in our church community."

The light-hearted entertainment continued during dinner as Mr. Vice, played by SK Retired Army Lt. Col Ernest Jackson, kept everyone laughing with comical "Points of Order" skits that poked fun at the inter-service rivalry and roasted a few good-humored guests. Guests were also treated to a special performance of the iconic World War II era hit *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* by our very own Andrew Sisters – portrayed by Debbie Jackson, Carmel Vaden, Denyse Meyers – and bugler/dancer John O'Brian, dressed in an authentic WW II Army uniform.

Later, the guests joined in the formal Punch Bowl Ceremony toasts, led by the Master of the Toast SK Jim Waggoner. Special toasts were offered to each branch of service, our Creator and military families. Waggoner said, "God Bless our soldiers, men and women. 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. They deserve our unwavering appreciation and gratitude with every breath of our being."

A solemn toast was also offered by Knight retired Lt.Col. Dave Vaden to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. These brave heroes were represented at an empty table set in memory of our Fallen Comrades.

After dinner, Port Orange Mayor Donald Burnette thanked the Knights for honoring local veterans, recognizing that they do much for their community. Lt. Col. Rob Moyer, the Army ROTC Commander at Embry Riddle University, 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.

Special recognition goes to our talented chef SK Al Citro, and his outstanding kitchen crew, who made the authentic Italian spaghetti, sausage and meatballs. General Audino complimented the food, saying dinner was delicious!

The Knights also want to thank the following community organizations for their help in honoring the veterans:

- The Color Guard by Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force ROTC at Embry Riddle University and SFC Cazares
- Displays by Boy Scout Troop 436:-Kevin Piper and Jim Baskin.
- Servers: Rob Brock & Warner Christian Academy; Rowena Hoblin & OLOH Youth
- Displays by Daytona Military Museum, LTC Dave Vaden
- Food: Olive Garden, BJ's, Walmart, Sam's Club, Gordon's, Mario's, Giuseppe's
- Supplies donated by SFC Lindy and SFC Matthew Marchese
- Ceramic Table Centerpieces - Ralph & Eleanor Ameduri

For more info: Contact Dr. Ernie Jackson, [50chevypickup@gmail.com](mailto:50chevypickup@gmail.com).