

Veterans helping veterans: Coalition honored for services

Guy Clifton, RGJ 8:41 a.m. PDT July 15, 2014



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For many years, the volunteers who make up the Northern Nevada Veterans Coalition have ensured every veteran and veteran's family member laid to rest at the Northern Nevada Veterans Cemetery in Fernley is done so with the utmost respect.

Every veteran — from privates to generals and E-1s to admirals — receive the same treatment: a full military service with an honor guard, color guard, chaplain, vocalist, rifle team and bugler. These are also the same folks who place flags or wreaths on the graves at the cemetery and a score of other thing in support of veterans and their families.

"We do the best we can for the veterans that we inter," said Brett Palmer, president of the coalition. "I'm very proud of everyone that is involved in this."

The coalition consists of about 60 people — 31 in the uniformed honor guard — who donate thousands of hours of their time to veterans and their families. The military funerals are provided free of charge.

On Saturday, several Northern Nevada veteran's organizations said thank you, treating the coalition volunteers to a barbecue at the VFW Post and presenting members with certificates and a plaque to honor their volunteer work.

"These guys do this day after day, week after week and year after year and we thought it was time to show them the appreciation they deserve," said John Sheets, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Sierra Nevada Chapter 989, which spearheaded the honor for the volunteers.

The Patriot Guard Riders, Daughters of the American Revolution Sagebrush Chapter, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Sons of the American Revolution, and veterans groups from the University of Nevada, Reno and Truckee Meadows Community College also took part in honoring the coalition volunteers.

"This is something that is long overdue," said Glenna Smith, regional representative for U.S. Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., who presented certificates of appreciation to the coalition volunteers. "They give their time as volunteers each and every day. They serve a need that many people don't even realize exists."

The coalition conducts an average of six services per week at the cemetery, but sometimes far more. On the fourth Thursday of every month, they also conduct services for veterans whose remains have gone unclaimed from funeral homes or county morgues, giving them the same reverence as any other veteran.

The coalition works in conjunction with The Missing in America Project, working to locate abandoned veterans' remains, verifying the veterans' status and providing an honorable burial.

"When they raised their hand and swore their oath, they earned that respect," Palmer said.

While the coalition's primary duty is to support the Northern Nevada Veterans Cemetery and deceased veterans and their families, the group is expanding its reach to help the living as well. It does a number of fund raising events throughout the year that supports the Veterans Guest House and other projects.

On Saturday, it announced that in partnership with Nevada State Bank, it would be purchasing a house in Fernley that will be used to help a veteran in need.

Calling it "a hand up, not a hand out," a veteran and his or her family will be able to stay in the house for up to a year as they work toward getting a home of their own.

The program is nearing completion of the planning stage and more information will be made available to veterans as the program comes on line.

Palmer said Saturday's barbecue and recognition program was first time outside veterans group had formally recognized the coalition volunteers.

"It means the world to them," he said of his fellow volunteers.

The Northern Nevada Veterans Coalition is always looking for volunteers to add to their ranks. Previous military service is not a requirement.

"You don't have to be a veteran to be a part of the coalition, but you do have to have a super soft spot in your heart for veterans," Palmer said.

How to help

The Northern Nevada Veterans Coalition accepts volunteers. It is not a requirement to be a veteran.

Contact: 775-980-7227.

Website: www.supportnvc.org