

Exeter Veterans Day program
by Leesa K. Bartu

"One day is not enough to honor these individuals," said Tim Wilbeck, the featured speaker at the Veteran's Day program in Exeter.

Area veterans were invited to the school an hour before the program where the school served them rolls and coffee. Student Council President Marcus Ruhl welcomed the crowd and led them in the pledge of allegiance to open the program.

The Exeter-Milligan Senior High Band played the Star Spangled Banner and the chorus performed May It Be and Coming Home.

Wilbeck, a Vietnam veteran, was next on the program. He thanked everyone who participated in the program and also thanked the members of the National Honor Society who helped put up the Avenue of Flags downtown.

In his speech Wilbeck's main objective was to help everyone present remember what sacrifices had been made. He told the story of a 23 year-old, Eddie Jeffers, who wrote an essay in which he stated, "Nothing in our lives will ever be as important as this . . ."

Jeffers, who was killed in Iraq, realized how important it was to defend our nation. Wilbeck talked about how our nation has paid veterans back for their service with disrespect.

"Our veterans have been shown disrespect when there is no bill passed to provide them with health care," said Wilbeck.

"Twenty-three percent of the homeless population in America are veterans and eighty-nine percent of those were honorably discharged," stated Wilbeck.

The American Legion and the VFW's are doing what they can to support the veterans and their families. Now our country is faced with "meeting the unique needs of woman vets and adequately address their problems as they return to civilian life," said Wilbeck.

But according to Wilbeck, "All is not grim. There have been constant improvements in healthcare for veterans. Communities are recognizing the quality and value of veterans."

To the veterans in the crowd, Wilbeck encouraged them to "trump your past military service. It was said Dwight Eisenhower was prouder of being a soldier than being President of the United States. Nothing you ever do will be this important."

To the rest of the crowd Wilbeck reminded them that "Never have so much been owed to so many by so few. We need to honor the 25 million veterans in this country, from the greatest generation to the latest generation. Let's stop this political nonsense and stop bickering . . . We must remember that freedom isn't free. Don't abuse your freedom because someone had to fight for it."

Wilbeck asked the crowd to "Be an American." To do some simple things like standing to honor the flag, thanking a veteran and honoring the men and women who have served. "So that their sacrifices will not be in vain."

After a round of applause for the message, John Tauriella entertained the crowd by singing God Bless the U.S.A.

The band performed America and Salute to American's Finest and encouraged each of the veterans present to stand when the song for their branch of service was played.

Megan Kuska, Student Council Vice President, closed the program thanking everyone for attending.