Stockton University Honors Sacrifices Made for Freedom in Veterans Day Ceremonies

For Immediate Release; with photos on flickr
Wednesday, November 11, 2015

Contact: **Maryjane Briant**
News and Media Relations Director
Galloway Township, NJ 08205
Maryjane.Briant@stockton.edu
(609) 652-4593
www.stockton.edu/media

Galloway, NJ - Stockton University today honored the sacrifices made by veterans and current service members and their families in Veterans Day ceremonies that also celebrated Stockton's new national recognition as one of the best universities in the nation for veterans.

"Just think, seven years ago we had 79 veterans on campus and now there are over 640 veterans in a program that is celebrated nationally," said Tom O'Donnell, assistant dean of Students and Veteran Affairs, referring to the re-establishment of the Veteran Affairs program in 2008.

"It's fitting that we are all here today in that I can't think of any institution of higher learning more dedicated to veterans than Stockton University," said the keynote speaker, Assemblywoman DiAnne Gove, R-9, whose district includes Galloway and parts of Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean counties.

"Adding to its long-standing and accomplished track record of serving veterans, Stockton was recently ranked at #6 among the best colleges and universities nationwide for veterans by the Military Times' "Best for Vets: Colleges 2016", said Gove.

The daughter of a WWII veteran, with ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War, Gove said, "My respect for veterans began at an early age with my father, who was everything to me.... Against this personal background, veterans' issues have played an extremely important role in my decision to serve in the Legislature." Gove sits on the Assembly's Higher Education and Military and Veterans Affairs committees.

"In a nation defined by its freedom and democratic values, veterans are justifiably held in such high regard in our society, as their character is accurately defined by a love of country, professionalism, selflessness and enduring commitment to their brothers and sisters in arms," she said.

-more-

-continued from page 1-

She noted that a number of the students to whom she taught American history and government in her 32-year career chose to enlist. "When teaching our country's history, you arrive at an inescapable and simple fact: Millions of people across the globe owe their freedom and their very lives to the courageous efforts of the United States military," she said. "I just wish that other countries would, at the very least, acknowledge this historical fact given the very high price our country has paid.

She also said that "not nearly enough credit is given to the absolutely indispensable role our nation's military service personnel play in massive relief efforts around the world."

Gove went on to say: "For me personally, American exceptionalism is rooted in our veterans' service to the nation."

"Stockton has made the commitment to effectively serve our veterans by, first and foremost, ensuring veterans have access to the highest quality education," she said.

Paul Garraty, sergeant-at-arms for Stockton's Student Veterans Organization (SVO) and a Galloway resident, urged his fellow veterans to continue to serve in civilian society.

"Uncertainty lies ahead for this country, and unlike the overwhelming majority of our generation, we have immense experience in proceeding through the fog of uncertainty and overcoming our objective, despite opposition," he said "Additionally, many of these young students we sit in class with every day look up to us. It is our responsibility to assist this generation, with the skills we have, to help foster success and make these United States as great as they ever were."

The three-part ceremony was held in three locations on campus: in front of the Campus Center, at Independence Plaza, with its two-story mural of the Declaration of Independence signed by Richard Stockton and other founders of the nation, and at Veterans Park.

At Independence Plaza, Wendy Lang, director of Operation College Promise, said Stockton is an example of best practices in aiding veterans to finish college. "Seventy percent are first generation learners," and need the support provided by her group and Stockton, she said.

Nelson Gonzalez, former president of the SVO and a Stockton graduate, said he is working for Catholic Charities helping homeless veterans in Atlantic and Cape May counties to find stable places to live. He urged those gathered at the plaza to say thanks to any veteran they see on the street.

The third stage was held in Veterans Park, "which is our innermost sanctum - a place of refuge and reflection," said Dean of Students Pedro Santana, in introducing Stockton Interim President Harvey Kesselman.

Kesselman, a member of the inaugural class when Stockton was established, reminded the gathering of Stockton's proud tradition of service to veterans.

"When we first opened up back in 1971, with about 1,000 students, there were literally hundreds of Vietnam veterans who were a part of the campus community," he said. "I remember very, very vividly when in 1982, buses from Stockton went to the opening of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall."

If it weren't for past and present veterans, "much of Stockton would not be what it is today," Kesselman said.

"We are here in love, respect and honor to lay a ceremonial wreath," he said. "We are proud of our veterans and we thank you all."

-more-

-continued from page 2-

The wreath was laid by Stockton 2014 graduate Robert Sister and his wife, Ty, both of whom are veterans.

Stockapella, a student a capella group, sang the national anthem and “Amazing Grace” during the ceremonies, and student Brielle Lord played Taps. Members of the Galloway Township Police Department, the Campus Police K-9 unit and members of the Stockton SVO presented the colors. Qwishan Isaac, a student veteran, read the Victorian-era poem, “Invictus,” by William Henley, noting that the Latin title means unconquered, “which is the mindset of veterans.”

Pastor John Quinn, also a faculty member at Stockton, gave the invocation and led prayers. He said the love and sacrifice of service people has given us freedom.

“We are humbled and grateful for their great offer of love for us,” he said.

To learn more about Stockton’s programs for veterans and students who are currently serving, visit the Office of Veteran Affairs.

# # #