
THE PATRIOT

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Huron Co. Veteran of Year ‘will continue to serve’

BELLEVUE — U.S. Marine Corps veteran Jim Ruffing learned about the importance of service from his father, Richard.

“My father was a World War II Army veteran. He told me, ‘One way or another, you’re going to have to serve your country. You can go with the Army or you can go with the Marine Corps. If you go with the Marine Corps, they are able to train their men better,’ so I chose the Marine Corps,” Ruffing said.



Jim Ruffing is the 2022 Huron County Veteran of the Year. (PHOTO BY CARYASHBY/HCVSO)

During the Veteran of the Year banquet on Dec. 3, the Huron County Area Veterans Council named Ruffing the 2022 Huron County Veteran of the Year. The other nominees were Kenneth Didion, Richard Kochel, and Diane Moyer.

Vickie Ruffing said the award means a lot because her husband works so hard.

“He’s the hardest working man I know,” she added.

With the Marine Corps League, Jim is the paymaster, the 2017 Marine of the Year, and has been awarded the Bull Dog award and Meritorious Merit Commendation. He is a coordinator for funeral details and honor guard units for area parades.

Ruffing also is the co-coordinator for the “Toys for Tots” campaign in Huron and Erie counties. He is the first vice commander at American Legion Post 547 in Monroeville, where he volunteers for fish fries, Friday night football games, parades and special events. (Continues on Page 2)

Veteran museum trips are successful



COLUMBUS – The Huron County Veteran Service had a successful two-year run with monthly trips to the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus.

Four veterans and two guests went on the final trip, Dec. 14. Overall in 2022, eight HCVSO drivers transported 43 different people to the museum during nine trips. One veteran went three times.

In 2021, there were 46 veterans and guests on seven trips.

Need transportation?

At least 48 hours before your appointment, call 419-668-4150. You also may request transportation online at huroncountyvets.com. Under the “services” tab, click on “transportation.”

We recommend you call as soon as you have your appointments, as ride availability fills up quickly.

Provide all of the following: Your full name; phone number; date, time and location of your appointment; and the last four digits of your Social Security number.

Ruffing has assisted with the distribution of food baskets for veterans during the holidays. He also has been an instrumental part of the fundraising for the Huron County Area Veterans Council.

“His drive and dedication is true to the spirit of being a great American,” according to his nomination.

Ruffing served in the Marines from 1968 through 1972. He enlisted after graduating from Monroeville High School in 1967.

“I served one year in Vietnam,” said Ruffing, who was a combat engineer. “Over in Vietnam I helped build bridges and helped build roads. We swept mines for rounds in the morning. ... I never did much mine sweeping. I know other people who did and it was extremely dangerous.”

Ruffing talked about the importance of serving his fellow veterans.

“There is a need out there for our veterans. Some are not able to help ... and I’m able to do it, although I do have my health issues also. I continue to serve,” he said. “I will continue to work for my fellow veterans.”



Vickie Ruffing says her husband Jim, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, being named the the 2022 Huron County Veteran of the Year “means a lot because he works so hard.” (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

Veterans visit Maplehurst Elementary School for Veterans Day

Photos by Cary Ashby, HCVSO part-time driver and community coordinator



Vietnam War veteran Lou Reda hugs his grandchildren, Livie and Jack Enderle, in the lobby of Maplehurst Elementary School in Norwalk. Reda served with the U.S. Air Force security forces from 1966 through 1970.



U.S. Marine Corps veteran Sean Meadows, of Norwalk, takes time to visit with his daughter, Cecelia, a first-grade student at Maplehurst Elementary School, during her lunch period. Meadows served in the Marines as an air frame engineer from 2000 through 2004.



A Maplehurst Elementary School student points at a photo of the C-141 jet that U.S. Air Force veteran Dan Ratliff flew on as a loadmaster.



Devon Payton, a first-grade student, talks with U.S. Marine Corps veteran Ron Kearney. Local veterans visited the school during students' lunch periods.

Veterans, Willard students enjoy time with each other

WILLARD — High school student Caleb Owsley enjoys hearing about veterans' experiences.

The senior was one of many Willard students who interacted with area veterans during the meet-and-greet breakfast before the annual Veterans Day program on Nov. 9.



“Veterans are the only reason that this country can be as free as it is. Without veterans, the military wouldn’t exist, so we wouldn’t be able to protect ourselves from other militaries. If we didn’t have that, then we’d be walked over by other countries,” Owsley said.

“I really enjoy talking with veterans. It makes me feel important, in a sense. It just makes me happy that I can make them feel treated well.”

Willard High School senior Caleb Owsley (left) listens to David Smith, of Willard, talk about his time in the U.S. Air Force. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

David Smith, of Willard, enjoys sharing his time in the U.S. Air Force with students. He worked in a civil engineering squadron as an exterior electrician lineman.

“I really appreciate what the Willard City Schools are doing for the veterans on Veterans Day. I’ve been here several times. The students are fascinated by what we have done in the United States military. I give them a little insight into the stuff I have done and what my fellow brothers and sisters also have done in the military,” Smith said.

Willard High School graduate Kyle Conley served in the U.S. Army from 2012 through 2016.



U.S. Army veterans Tyler Rocker (from left), Seth Stephens, U.S. Marine Corps veteran Wesley Jester and Army veteran Kyle Conley gather before the 2022 Veterans Day program by Willard City Schools. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

“I was an intelligence analyst for infantry battalions,” said Conley, who added it’s nice to see the schools honoring veterans.

“I don’t know what the driving factor is, but it seems all the small towns in the area started doing it around the same time. I see the (veteran) signs throughout town and that’s kinda cool. I think it’s a good idea.”

Army veteran served during Korean War

WILLARD — Elden Eastman said he had “a lot of fear” and was anxious about being drafted into the U.S. Army.

Eastman served from 1954 through 1956. During his basic training in Fort Knox, Ky., he was trained to be a petroleum, oil and lubricants specialist for material that was supplied to South Korea. His later training also included food services.

After basic training, Eastman was stationed in Fort Lee, Va. He then went to Fort Belvoir.

“Then I went to Fort Lee, New Jersey and got on a ship and they took me over to Bremerhaven, Germany. I stayed there for a while. Then they shipped me to France,” said Eastman, 89, who graduated from North Fairfield High School.

After his time in the Army, Eastman worked at the Shelby Air Depot.

“I came home from service and went right back to work at the Shelby Air Depot. When I was drafted, I worked at the depot. I was next in line for the warehouse foreman,” he said.

Eastman got laid off because the depot shut down. Eventually, his time in the military helped him get a promotion in another job.

“Then I went to work for Akron Standard Mold in Greenwich. I worked there for 22 1/2 years,” he said. “My boss saw that I was in the Army and I respected people, so he promoted me to production control supervisor.”

Eastman, who graduated from North Fairfield High School, has lived in Willard for 19 years.



Elden Eastman, 89, of Willard, and his wife Carol enjoy a light breakfast before the 2022 Veterans Day program by Willard City Schools. Eastman served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

(PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

Transportation Year in Review by Ryan Wolfe

What a great year 2022 has been.



This 2022 Ford Explorer is the newest vehicle in the Huron County Veteran Service Office fleet. (PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)

Rides have been steady each month, with an average of 190 per month. This year we have transported veterans all over the state and some outside.

With the VA outsourcing many appointments, it takes us in every direction. Our drivers are glad to do so. When you see them, please thank them. Tom Rusynyk, John Martin, Mike Greene, Fred Walton, Tom Lovitt, Terry Mercer, Ron Kearney, and Cary Ashby are all great assets to the office. Great work, everyone.

In 2022, we were able to introduce a new 2022 Ford Explorer to the fleet. We are hoping to add another vehicle in 2023.

Here is a breakdown of HCVSO transportation in 2022:

539 - Trips to Louis Stokes VA in Cleveland
 198 - Sandusky VA
 76 - Parma VA
 66 - Mansfield VA

21 - Lorain VA
 3 - Toledo VA
 125 - Other medical trips
 526 - Non-medical trips

Veterans honored at Norwalk High School

NORWALK — Students formed an honor line and applauded the veterans as they left the 2022 Veterans Day assembly at Norwalk High School.

The choir, under the direction of Carol Mason, opened the program by singing “The Star Spangled Banner.” The group later performed a moving rendition of “America the Beautiful.” The final musical performance was “Taps” by sophomore Landon Bennett.



PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO

Senior Grace Bolton shared her winning essay that allowed her to participate in the recent Huron County Honor Trip. She said accompanying two veterans to lay wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery was a surreal experience and “an incredibly important honor.”

The featured speaker was Bryce Ostheimer, a former Berlin Heights resident who is the social media coordinator for the Corpsman Maxton W. Soviak Memorial Foundation. Soviak was killed in action at 22 years old on Aug. 26, 2021, by a suicide bomber at the Abbey Gate of the Kabul airport in Afghanistan.

The foundation recently purchased a service dog, now a 15-month-old puppy, for a veteran in Texas. It also helped Lorain County donate an emotional support dog for a veteran with PTSD.

Ostheimer’s friendship with Soviak started in preschool.

“It grew into a brotherhood,” Ostheimer said. “If you needed him, he would be there and have your back. ... Max was always the toughest person in the room.”



PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO

Marine of the Year, former firefighter enjoys giving back

NORWALK — U.S. Marine Corps veteran Ron Kearney enjoys being one of the drivers for the Huron County Veteran Service Office.

“I worked for almost five years driving a van for the railroad,” he said.

Kearney, who attended Norwalk High School, obtained his GED when he was at Camp Lejeune. After graduating from boot camp in April 1969, he served in the Marines from February 1969 through February 1973.

To become an equipment mechanic, Kearney went through 28 days of “diesel school.”



U.S. Marine Corps veteran Ron Kearney smiles for the camera with Olivia Eggleston, a kindergarten student at Maplehurst Elementary School in Norwalk, during her lunch period. Kearney, who attended Maplehurst as a child, was one of several local veterans who talked to students for Veterans Day. *(PHOTO BY CARY ASHBY/HCVSO)*

League named Kearney the 2022 Marine of the Year.

He is in charge of the Marine Corps League scholarship program. High school students with a family member who was in the Marines (retired or honorably discharged) are eligible for the detachment scholarships.

“It’s also available to Marines who have a handicap who want to get more education,” Kearney said.

The camaraderie with Marines his age has made his Marine Corps League experience special. Kearney said one of the challenges is getting younger people involved.

“Our detachment is not that big, but the more (Marines) we get in, the more fun we can have,” he said. “We help our needy Marine veteran families when they need it, especially around the holidays and of course, through hard times — and that’s the way most of the service clubs are.”

Kearney was stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station in lawkuni, Japan for 13 months.

“When I get out of the Marine Corps at MCAS Una in Arizona, I stayed in Arizona for 43 years. I was a heavy equipment mechanic for different rental outlets and different dealerships. I drove service trucks all over the state of Arizona. I saw the Valley of the Sun, which is (in) the Phoenix area, grow from a little spot to a gargantuan size now and I saw it all grow — I was part of it,” he said.

From 1983 through 1989, Kearney served as a reserve firefighter in a department in the east valley of Maricopa County in Arizona. He said the “subscription service” covered areas of the county without fire service.

“Firefighting was a completely different story (than being in the Marines). People ask me why I would do it and I did it to learn and give, to help the community,” he said.

Most recently, Kearney has been a member of the Elton E. Mackin Detachment #837 of the Marine Corps League for nearly six years. He was elected junior vice commandant, then senior vice commandant and eventually, commandant. In November, the Marine Corps