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Veterans Voices project comes to U-46 classrooms

Submitted by Elgin Area School District U-46

This month, students and staff in Elgin Area School District U-46 will support and honor local veterans and troops with special ceremonies, concerts, breakfasts, and assemblies. In addition, dozens of local veterans are visiting schools across the district this week and next to talk to students about their service and their lives in a program being held in partnership with the Gail Borden Public Library.

"By welcoming these veterans into our classrooms, the students get to learn about American history from a very personal perspective, and to better understand the sacrifices that members of the military make," said U-46 Chief Executive Officer Tony Sanders. "At the same time, it's a wonderful way for our students and staff to have a chance to express their appreciation, in person, for the veterans' service."

Tish Calhamer, community engagement manager at Gail Borden Public Library, is working with 40 volunteer veterans who will visit more than 100 U-46 classrooms as part of the special program, called Veterans Voices.

Veterans who may want to participate in future events are encouraged to visit www.gailborden.info/veterans to learn more and submit a volunteer application.

"This program draws on the power of personal stories, and reminds students that history is all around them," Calhamer said.

Amador "Johnny" Vargas, a 90-year-old veteran of the Korean War, visited Veronica Aristeo's dual language classroom this week at Garfield Elementary School in Elgin as part of the Veterans Voices program.

"I was proud to be a soldier. I fought for that flag," he said, pointing to the American flag hanging in the corner of the fifth-grade classroom.

Vargas was drafted into the Army, serving from 1951 to 1953 in the 2nd Infantry Division's 38th regiment. He described how patrols were organized, how soldiers would take turns in foxholes -- one sleeping while the other would be on guard, and he spoke with pride about his division's reputation as one feared by the soldiers on the other side.

Vargas learned to play the trumpet as a child, and after he returned from military service (as a corporal) he had his own band. As a retiree, he found his musical talents in demand playing "Taps" at military funerals, and in a moment during which he got wistful, he described for the students how he prefers to play the song, slow and drawn out.

"When I play 'Taps' I think of all my buddies I lost in Korea, and I put a lot of feeling into it," he said. "I want people to feel the emotions I feel."

Additional Veterans Day events:

- On Friday, Nov. 9, Larsen Middle School, 665 Dundee Ave. in Elgin, will host a breakfast for veterans at 8 a.m. in the library, followed by an all-school assembly with the EHS band performing and two guest speakers.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Lords Park Elementary, 323 Waverly Drive in Elgin, will host a breakfast for veterans 8 a.m., and a chorus will perform a medley of songs to honor them. Veterans will visit classrooms to talk to students and answer questions.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, South Elgin High, 760 E. Main St., will host a Veterans Day ceremony at 8 a.m.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Heritage Elementary, 507 Arnold Ave. in Streamwood, will host a Veterans Day ceremony at 8:30 a.m.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Liberty Elementary School, 1375 W. Bartlett Road in Bartlett, will host a Veterans Day breakfast and celebration at 8:45 a.m.
- For each dollar a student or staff member at Canton Middle School, 1100 Sunset Circle in Streamwood donates the week of Nov. 5, they will receive a strip of paper to honor, remember or thank a service member. The goal is to fill the halls of Canton with a "Chain of Thanks." During a Nov. 9 assembly at 9 a.m., the donation will be presented to Salute, Inc., the Canton Band will perform, and the school will honor the veterans in attendance.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Kenyon Woods Middle School, 1515 Raymond St., South Elgin, will host a musical salute to veterans and a panel of veterans and active members of the armed forces talking to each social studies class throughout the day at 9:15 a.m.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Bartlett High, 701 Schick Road, a Veterans Day assembly will be held at 9:18 a.m.

- On Friday, Nov. 9, Willard Elementary, 370 W. Spring St. in South Elgin, will host a Veterans Day assembly at 1 p.m.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Kimball Middle School, 451 N. McLean Blvd. in Elgin, will host a Veterans Day assembly featuring the Elgin Veterans of Foreign Wars Post, a color guard, and discussion of flag etiquette at 2:30 p.m.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, students at Clinton Elementary, 770 Mill St. in South Elgin, have written "thank you" letters to veterans, collected candy for troops, and designed a "Wall of Honor." Students and staff are urged to wear red, white, and blue.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Elgin High, 1200 Maroon Drive, lunch and performance by members of the band honoring current veterans on staff, in addition to a display outside the main office.
- On Friday, Nov. 9, Nature Ridge Elementary, 1899 Westridge Blvd., Bartlett, is organizing "Operation Gratitude" to collect candy to send to troops
- Through Nov. 12, Larkin High School, 1475 Larkin Ave. in Elgin, is hosting a display outside the deans' offices honoring Larkin's veterans and active-duty military.
- On Monday, Nov. 12, a member of Veterans Voices will speak to Amy Weber's kindergarten room at 11:30 a.m. at Creekside Elementary School in Elgin.
- On Monday, Nov. 12, Hawk Hollow Elementary School in Bartlett will hold a Veterans Day celebration at 8:45 a.m.
- During the building-wide "Morning Meeting" on Monday, Nov. 12, Hillcrest Elementary teachers will lead their students in close reading activities, creating a timeline regarding the history of Veterans Day, and writing a "thank you" letter to veterans to post by their classrooms.
- On Monday, Nov. 12, as part of the school's "Socks for Soldiers" drive, new socks can be dropped off at the front office of Ronald D. O'Neal Elementary School, 510 Franklin Blvd. in Elgin. Donations will be given to the Elgin American Legion Post.
- On Monday, Nov. 12, Spring Trail Elementary School in Carol Stream, students and staff will be encouraged to wear red, white, and blue.
- On Tuesday, Nov. 13, Sycamore Trails Elementary in Bartlett will hold a Veterans Day assembly at 8:30 a.m.

- On Friday, Nov. 16, students will perform a musical program to honor veterans at 8:45 a.m. and 9:45 a.m. at Garfield Elementary School, 420 May St., Elgin.
- Throughout the first half of the month, students at Fox Meadow Elementary in South Elgin, will write thank-you letters to veterans in nursing homes.