

Features



[TOP](#)

Puxico R-8 Schools Veterans Day Assembly 2023

NOVEMBER 15TH 2023 BY DEE LOFLIN

Puxico R-8 Schools Veterans Day Assembly 2023

The annual Puxico School District's Veterans Day Assembly was held on Wednesday, November 8, 2023. The District was out on Friday so they held it earlier in the week.

Students who participate in FCCLA (Family Career and Community Leaders of America) club welcomed visitors and veterans. They also prepared a luncheon of ham, green beans, corn, mashed potatoes, gravy, dessert and drinks for approximately 80 veterans and their family members.

Laney Porter opened the ceremony while Austin Harbin and Zach Jones presented the colors. The Pledge of Allegiance was held by Ziti Boyco and the Puxico High School band played the Star Spangled Banner.

The guest speaker was Robert Wake of the Wake Foundation in Poplar Bluff. He was a veteran of Iraq and was wounded in combat being awarded a Purple Heart. He was also born and reared in Kennett, Missouri and now lives in Poplar Bluff, MO

On May 16, 2004, Sgt Wake was wounded severely when his detail received intense enemy fire.

“At about 3 o’clock in the morning, after moving back from a machine gun nest on the roof of a police station, me and the medic decided to have an MRE in the dark,” Wake said. “We had been in a 17-hour gun battle. We were fighting very hard being up on the roof. There were 16 of us and about 5,000 of them. The medic lit a cigarette and I heard a bomb come down the tube. It exploded between me and the medic.”

That was the beginning of an his long road to recover. This incident left Wake with 141 bits of shrapnel in his body.

"I really remember the bright flash and I remember feeling like a big part of my body was on fire," stated Wake. "It broke my nose, it knocked out my upper front teeth, shattered my right ankle and blew out my left knee and tory my frontal lobe."

Wake was in and out of consciousness for hours.

"Somehow I had crawled across the roof. I realized I was still alive, and I just said, 'God. If you just help me get home ...' And I went out again. The last time I came to, I had all my gear on and I had fallen backward through a window into this room ..." Filled with frightened Iraqi policemen, he explained.

"I went out and when I came to again, the Army had me in a stairwell," Wake said. "I could hear them calling my name over the radio, reporting there was blood coming from my ears, nose, eyes and I said 'This is not good.'

"My best friend and another gentleman carried me five flights of stairs. I have no memory of it. They got me into a Humvee and we went through another ambush before I could get out. Something I thought was five minutes lasted more than five hours. That's how much time I lost during that ordeal. I was then awarded the Purple Heart on July 4th in Baghdad."

VFW Post Commander Duane Martin help present the Quilt of Honor

Former Puxico R-8 Schools Superintendent George Sifford, 96, a World War II U.S. Navy veteran and "the oldest man in town" was awarded a numbered and recorded Quilt of Honor to commemorate his service to the United States. He received a standing ovation from the crowd.

Sifford was assigned to an aircraft carrier and spent 16 years as superintendent at Puxico School District.

Tonna O'Dell received the Teacher of the Year. She is a junior high social studies teacher.

Martin stated, "This is an annual event with the school and our organization sponsors programs dedicated to patriotism among students, the Patriot Pen and Voice of Democracy writing contests. The community support and the school support we have are overwhelming."

Alyssa Owens earned the Patriot Pen Speech winner and Ella Duncan won the Voice of Democracy Speech. Both reach their speeches to the audience.

Andrea Clark and Caiden Jackson accepted Patriot's Pen second and third place. Stephanie Day and Aricka Robinson placed second and third in the Voice of Democracy category.

Each were honored with medals and certificates of merit from the VFW and Auxiliary.

Rachell McGill recognized the winners of the Coloring Contest. Each student came to the stage for a group photo.

The Puxico Band played America the Beautiful and Taps was played by Joshua Simons to close the event.

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