



WITH THANKS THIS VETERANS DAY



Veteran Ben Johnson Jr. enjoys a cup of coffee at Java Moon Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2020.

MATTHEW GASTON | THE SHERIDAN PRESS

BEST. WEEKEND. EVER.



FILE PHOTO | THE SHERIDAN PRESS

Veterans, friends and family cheer during the WYO West Warrior Foundation weekend at the Dow Ranch Friday, Aug. 31, 2018. Each year the event brings more than 30 veterans and their friends and family to the Sheridan area for camaraderie and relaxation.

‘Thank you for your service’

How do veterans feel about this phrase?

BY TRACEE DAVIS
AND CARRIE HADERLIE
NEWS@THESHERIDANPRESS.COM

SHERIDAN — “Thank you for your service” is a phrase that has been incorporated into societal mantra as a pre-conjured way to convey respect. However, those words weren’t always a common phrase, and their meaning changes slightly among different generations of veterans.

Wyoming Veterans Commission Executive Director Tim Sheppard said he has seen society’s views about military service evolve over time.

“I am a post-Vietnam veteran, but when I joined the military, it was just after the Vietnam War. We were not well-respected at all,” he said. “As a matter of fact... we were not allowed to go downtown by ourselves. There was such a bad feeling toward the military.”

The war in Vietnam was notoriously unpopular among the young adult generation of that day, and many of those who served in that war did so not on their own volition, but because they were drafted.

They returned home to often have their military involvement be mocked or insulted. Thankfully, times have changed, and today’s veterans are commonly acknowledged.

“Forty-plus years later, turn that around and it still warms my heart to have someone say, ‘Thank you for your service,’” Sheppard said. “It means the world to me.”

The feeling among the most recent generation of veterans, those classified under the era of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, varies a bit more. The thanks offered are processed and understood through the lens of the diverse experience of each individual.

Elizabeth (LeAnn) McCartney honorably served four years in the Marine



Marine Corps veteran Eric Trueblood warms up at the Sheridan YMCA gym before diving into his workout Thursday, Oct. 29, 2020.

Corps but has complicated emotions that rise up when she is thanked for her service.

“Being a woman who broke her hip during training, (I have) felt ever since that I somehow don’t compare to those who have been deployed because they have sacrificed much, much more than I,” she said, adding that people are often surprised when they learn she is a veteran because she does not fit into generally accepted concepts of what a veteran looks like.

McCartney served out her enlistment as a military police officer providing base security stateside. While her role was undoubtedly an important one, it wasn’t the all-inclusive hero’s journey she hoped for.

“When someone says to me, ‘Thank you for your service,’ I almost cringe inside because I was glad to have joined and had the experience, but I was irate when I wasn’t assigned to a deployable unit and feel that I was not all I could have

been. It is that response that makes me discreet about my military service,” she said.

Even those who deployed often go through a process of coming to terms with being thanked when they come back home.

“It’s humbling,” said Ben Johnson Jr., who enlisted in the Marines and worked as a mechanic. “I didn’t know how to respond for a long time. I have just learned to say, ‘You’re welcome,’ and if the person I’m talking to is also a service member, I say ‘thank you’ right back.”

Johnson holds the memory of four friends who were killed by a roadside bomb north of Baghdad in 2007. He said he recognizes that while thanking can’t change what has happened, it’s at least something.

“That’s really all you can do is say thanks and remember them every day,” he said.

Veterans experience packed event

BY CARRIE HADERLIE
NEWS@THESHERIDANPRESS.COM

SHERIDAN — Every year, veterans from across the world come to Sheridan for the “Best Weekend Ever.”

Over Labor Day, the WYO West Warrior Foundation takes warriors, veterans, first responders, law enforcement officers and Gold Star Families shooting, on a half-day trail ride on horseback, provides them with local meals and the camaraderie of being with their brothers and sisters.

Brad Walden with the nonprofit WYO West Warrior Foundation said the name stands for “Warriors Empowered Standing Together,” and was founded in 2016. At that time, the organization raised \$16,000 and provided a weekend’s worth of activities to five veterans. Since then, it offers the “Best Weekend Ever” to 30-40 veterans.

“We open the weekend to veterans from all over the world. This isn’t just a Sheridan event,” Walden said. “We bring in veterans who may even be active duty, and we bring them in on Thursday and until Monday. We bring in warriors, veterans, first responders, law enforcement officers and Gold Star Families, which are our most cherished families.”

The weekend starts with a welcome dinner and live music, and then the participants are split into two groups for activities over the weekend.

One group goes to Dow Ranch, where they skydive and shoot a course out of a helicopter. They shoot long-distance and pistol, and shoot trap. They also throw axes at the Redneck Games and they rappel.