Gallup celebrates veterans, military at annual Veterans Day ceremony

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Hundreds turn out for tribute

With hundreds of retired veterans calling Gallup home, the city does itself right when Veterans Day rolls around. This year was no exception as more than 200 people attended a prayer vigil, an honorary ceremony, a laying of wreathes and a parade Nov. 11 at various locales around the Indian Capital.

"Know all your veterans," Dave Cuellar, a U.S. Army vet and member of Gallup's Veterans Helping Veterans told a sizeable gathering at the McKinley County Courthouse Plaza. "Know all of your veterans – past and present."

With American flags practically everywhere, the vigil was held at the Veterans Helping Veterans Post along West Maloney Avenue.

"It's awesome to see so many people here honoring the veterans," Mike Perez, 73, a retired city of Gallup employee, said. Perez served a tour-of-duty in Vietnam. "I like this as did a lot of the veterans in attendance. This is alright, I guess. I think veterans everywhere want to be appreciated."

A short ceremony was held at the city-operated Hillcrest Cemetery along Aztec Avenue. There, onlookers witnessed the laying of wreaths, a 21-gun salute and a short program which included speakers.

Later, a parade started from the Gurley Motor Body Shop on Aztec and proceeded to the McKinley County Courthouse Plaza, which is home to Gallup's Veteran's Memorial. Former Gallup resident John Encino sang the national anthem at the downtown ceremony. Cuellar, Mayor Jackie McKinney and Tooley Brown of Veterans Helping Veterans were part of the 20-minute ceremonial program.

"We need to keep our shoulder to the wheel to help our veterans," McKinney said during a short

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speech. "We all must thank our veterans for what they do and for what they have done."

Gallup's Lawrence Talamante, a U.S. Navy veteran, was the Grand Marshal of the event. Talamante, 91, served aboard the USS Pine Island – which was part of the Pacific fleet that tended sea planes engaged in air rescue operations during the final phases of World War II.

"Greetings to everyone," Talamante said at being introduced. "I didn't know what I'd do at 16, 17 years old, but I did something that was very worthwhile and courageous."

Throughout the parade, some people could be seen from the sideline carrying miniature flags, clapping and cheering as the parade passed. In each of the events, veterans shook hands and hugged their fellow veterans.

"It's just a wonderful day, a wonderful occasion," Tony Torres, 65, a U.S. Army vet and Gallup resident, said. "I appreciate this and all of the veterans here right now appreciate this."

McKinney and Cuellar acknowledged Encinio, who was born in Albuquerque and raised in Gallup. Encinio plays the guitar and sings, and regularly performs in Las Vegas and has sung the national anthem at various Indian Capital events over the years.

"I think events like this are very important," City Councilor Allan Landavazo said. While not a veteran himself, Landavazo said his father and uncles served in the military. Landavazo was one of several local politicos attending the Courthouse ceremony. "I support what our veterans have done."

The celebration of Veterans Day was first created to memorialize the end of World War I. The major hostilities of the war terminated on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. The day was named Veterans Day in the U.S. in 1954 and has become a day to remember and honor all U.S. military veterans.

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