Veterans Speak of Sacrifice, Honor at Saddleback College Tribute to Service Men and Women

Mission Viejo, CA – Veterans and active duty service members were honored for their service at Saddleback College’s Veterans Appreciation Day on Monday, November 10th, from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. in room 212 of the Student Services Center. The event featured speakers who served during World War II, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the Iraq War. A panel of Saddleback College counselors and staff members offered information on college services for veterans, and a film about World War I by Clark Jarrett, Saddleback College’s Alumnus of the Year, was presented.

A Color Guard led the Pledge of Allegiance. Color Guard members included xx, xx, xx, xx, who are all serving in the United States Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton.

The event’s Master of Ceremonies was Saddleback College Chief of Police Harry Parmer, a Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars, who stated, “Let us thank all veterans for their service, and remember those missing in action who cannot be with us today. Their sacrifices will not be forgotten.”

Dr. Tod A. Burnett, President of Saddleback College, stated, “The veterans and active duty service members in this room represent the best of America, and we all live freely because of their dedication to our nation. The Saddleback College community thanks our service men and women for the sacrifices they make every day.”

David Curry, Veterans Outreach Specialist, Iraq War Veteran, and Saddleback College student, stated, “Saddleback College offers comprehensive services to help veterans and active military personnel get a college education. Veterans Appreciation Day was an opportunity for the college to share our services with the community and pay tribute to the veterans who deserve the utmost gratitude.

Guest speakers included Fred Whitaker, a World War II veteran of the United States Army who fought in the Battle of the Bulge and was at the liberation of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Mr. Whitaker is a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart recipient.
Also speaking was Major Bill Mimiaga, who served as a drill instructor and combat infantryman in the United States Marine Corps’ first and third divisions in the Vietnam War. He later served in the Persian Gulf War in the Marine Aircraft Wing. After Major Mimiaga retired from the Marine Corps in 1997, he entered the “Troops to Teachers” program and was named a California Teacher of the Year in 2006 for his commitment to teaching special education students in the Long Beach Unified School District.

Finally, Orange County Deputy Sheriff Scott Montoya, who served in the Iraq War as a sergeant in the Marine Corps’ scout-sniper platoon, spoke about his experiences in Iraq. Mr. Montoya was awarded the Navy Cross, the highest medal awarded by the Navy and the second highest award given for valor, for the extraordinary heroism he demonstrated when he risked his own life in the midst of heavy gunfire to bring a wounded Iraqi civilian and several wounded fellow Marines to safety.

Following the guest speakers, a Saddleback College panel answered questions regarding counseling, disabled services and special programs, veterans services and outreach, career advising and placement, and financial aid. Panelists included Counselor and Applied Psychology Professor Rich Potratz, Counselor of Disabled Services and Special Programs Loma Hopkins, Financial Aid Specialist Javier Williams, Fiscal/Veterans Specialist Howard Dwight, Career Placement Officer Eric Hilden, and Veterans Outreach Representative David Curry.

Finally, the multiple award winning film “The Return of Paul Jarrett,” a documentary about a World War I veteran’s return to France, was presented. The film was written, produced, and directed by Clark Jarrett, Saddleback College’s Alumnus of the Year.

Outside organizations that were in attendance included the Laguna Hills Office of Veterans Affairs, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Saddleback College Student Veterans, University of California, Irvine Student Veterans, University of California, Irvine Admissions, and Habitat for Humanity “Homes for Heroes.” Also in attendance providing information were Saddleback College’s Community Education Department, Foundation, and Associated Student Government.

For more information on Saddleback College’s veterans outreach services, please call (949) 582-4272, or email Outreach Specialist Leslie Humphrey at lhumphrey@saddleback.edu or Student Veterans Outreach Specialist David Curry dcurry@saddleback.edu.

Photos (attached): The Color Guard leads the Pledge of Allegiance; the oldest and youngest veterans at Veterans Appreciation Day joined Saddleback College Chief of Police Harry Parmer in the ceremonial cutting of the cake.

Located in Mission Viejo, Saddleback College is celebrating its 40th year of providing quality higher education to the south Orange County community. For more information on the college and its programs, please visit www.saddleback.edu.