HANCOCK SCHOOL CELEBRATES VETERANS' DAY; PAYS TRIBUTE TO TEACHER NOW SERVING IN IRAQ

Veterans' Day has special meaning for the Hancock Elementary School this year, as students and staff eagerly await the return of 4th Grade Teacher Peter Farley, who is currently serving as a Military Policeman in Iraq. On November 10, 2008, the school hosted a "Take a Veteran to School Day" event, inviting more than 30 veterans from all branches of the military to share their stories with students.

The event was a wonderful learning experience for the students, who had an opportunity to hear what Veterans' Day means to those who have served.

"We believe it is important to honor the brave men and women who have served our country and that the best way to show our gratitude is teaching students about the sacrifices veterans have made on our behalf," said Principal Márcia Andrade-Serpa.

Take a Veteran to School Day is a national event sponsored by The History Channel. Across the country, thousands of veterans visited schools to discuss their experiences and explain what freedom and democracy mean to them. Locally, the event was sponsored by Comcast Cable, which provided all Hancock School children with wristbands reminding them of the importance of Veterans' Day. The school's Peer Leaders and Citizens of the Month, who helped run the event, were also given dog tags reminding them of the important contributions veterans have made to the country.

"Woven into the fabric of The History Channel is our ongoing commitment to chronicling the contributions of our nation's soldiers and veterans. Whether they fought on the beaches of Normandy or on the streets of Fallujah or served stateside, every veteran has a story to tell. It is a natural extension of History to help secure the remarkable legacy of our veterans - past and present," said Nancy Dubuc, Executive Vice President and General Manager of History.

At the Hancock School, veterans shared their experiences during war and peacetime service. George Hursey, the city's last Pearl Harbor survivor, explained his gratitude at living in a free country.

"Just be proud you are an American," said Hursey, who served in the US Army.

In other classrooms, veterans of the Navy, Marines and Air Force shared their experiences. Some served in Korea and Vietnam. There were veterans who served during peacetime and others who were deployed to Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Bryan O'Rourke and his fiancée, Stephanie Beland, shared their experiences in the US Army reserves. O'Rourke's daughter, Ashleigh is a 6th grader at the school, and he discussed his two tours of duty in Iraq. Beland has been deployed once.

"It was extraordinary how informed the children were. We talked about training and how to prepare for a deployment. I was surprised by how
outstanding their questions were," he said.

Ashleigh said it was "awesome" to have her dad and his fiancé address the class about their experiences.

"I think it was a good way to honor my dad and my stepmom and all the veterans, to have a day to remember and be thankful for what they've done," Ashleigh said.

Parent Kim Silvia was the driving force behind the "Take a Veteran to School Day" event. Students and faculty were asked to invite family members or friends who have served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard or Marines to attend the one-hour event and speak to children about their experiences. Silvia also reached out to the local VFW and Veterans' Administration Medical Center. Holmes-McDuffy Florists also donated boutonnières for all of the veterans and guests.

"I think children need to understand and appreciate what these men and women have done for all of us, and to have a way to say thank you for your service," Silvia said.

Silvia's husband, David, served with the Marines in Grenada, and her father is also a veteran. Her son Sean, a third grader, happily introduced his father to his class.

"I'm very proud of my dad and my granddad," he said. "It was cool that my Dad and the other veterans got to share what they did in the service. To me, Veterans' Day means that we should be thinking of the people who served our country."

Tanya Gabaldon, who served in the Army and Marines in the early 1990s, said she was honored to have been invited through a contact at the VA. She said she was pleased to see how excited the students were to thank the veterans.

"I really appreciate being invited, and I really enjoyed myself. It's so nice to see veterans being honored and respected, and I was glad to be here," she said.

Even though he couldn't be with them, the students and staff also wanted to honor Peter Farley on Veterans' Day.

"We are honoring Mr. Farley's service by sending a care package to him and his fellow soldiers," Principal Andrade-Serpa said. "Mr. Farley is interested in the rebuilding of Iraqi schools, and he asked that we send school supplies that he and his fellow soldiers can distribute. We feel this is a very fitting tribute."