

# Veterans honored at celebrations in Sayreville schools

Susan Loyer, @SusanLoyerMyCJ 5:31 p.m. EST November 10, 2014

*Two Sayreville schools held Veteran's Day events. At St. Stanislaus Kostka School the group also honored borough resident Edwin A. Kolodziej, a highly decorated World War II Army veteran.*



(Photo: TOM SPADER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

SAYREVILLE (/search/sayreville/) – For Kripa Sridhar, it's all about gratitude.

"I think it's very important to honor the vets because they've sacrificed so much for us and they protect us," said the St. Stanislaus Kostka School seventh-grader, whose grandfather served in the armed forces. "They gave up so much for us and we are enjoying things because of them. It's an emotional moment for everyone."

That emotional moment was shared by many Monday as students, staff and community members paid tribute to veterans during the school's 2014 Veterans Day celebration.

Borough resident Edwin A. Kolodziej, a highly decorated World War II Army veteran, was honored as this year's Veteran of the Year .

A graduate of Rutgers and a member of the borough high school's Class of 1943, Kolodziej is a retired attorney. He also served as a state assemblyman at-large, state lottery commissioner and was an assistant prosecutor in Middlesex County.

Kolodziej received the Silver Star, Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge and New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal for his gallantry in action in France, while serving with the 95th Infantry Division.

"The Combat Infantry Badge was given to me personally by Gen. (George S.) Patton," Kolodziej said proudly. "You get the Combat Infantry Badge if you are actually engaged in combat."

Kolodziej said he received the Bronze Star Award and Combat Infantry Badge for his bravery in combat in Vezon, France, in October of 1944 in which he killed about 20 Germans.

"The next morning I went back to Company B to talk to the captain and on the way I met Gen. Patton walking along the battlefield," he said. "He asked me what happened. He told me to go back to my regiment and he would come and decorate me. Everyone in my patrol got the Combat Infantry Badge."

Kolodziej also received recognition for his bravery during an attack on Metz.

"We were sent to help a trapped rifle company," he said. "They sent us to help, but we were trapped, too. In order to get out of it, my partner and I got in a position where we fired into their firing ports. They were so scared that 40 surrendered. That allowed the whole attack on the whole front to move forward. For that I got the Silver Star. It's also the 70th anniversary of conquering Metz."

Kolodziej appeared on the History Channel's "Shootout!" on Nov. 29, 2005 that depicted the World War II battle in Vezon, France, in 1944. He also appeared in another documentary about the attack on Metz.

Kolodziej said he was "brought to tears" by the children during the program.

"I often wondered why I did what I did," he said. "I served 139 days in combat — 104 continuous without a break It dawned on me today that the real reason that we did this was because of what we saw today. All these children marching up and singing patriotic songs. These children would not be here doing what they were doing if we had not done what we did."

## The program

The program, which was attended by parents, government officials, veterans and members of the school community, began with the Posting of Colors by the American Legion Lenape Post No. 211.

The Rev. Kenneth Murphy, pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka parish, gave the invocation and Principal Elena Malinconico welcomed the group.

"Today we honor in a very small way those men and women who served our country in all branches of the military — keeping our faith and maintaining our country's freedoms," Malinconico said.

The students, under the direction of music teacher and chorus director Debra Kubeck, sang various patriotic songs, including "God Bless America," "You're a Grand Old Flag" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The group also heard from Assemblyman John S. Wisniewski, D-19th District, who thanked students for their performances. He explained how important it is for students to learn to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made, but also to learn about the history of the nation in the process. He also spoke about the accomplishments of Kolodziej.

He said "the humility with which he served and the pride in which he served is a testament to all of us and a lesson for all of us."

"We all are not privileged to wear the uniform of the United States of America, but we all are privileged to have benefited from those who did wear the uniform and those who today do wear the uniform," Wisniewski said. "We have an obligation to say thank you not just on Veterans Day, but every single day of the year."

The group also heard from U.S. Army veteran Ken Kelly, who filled in for Sayreville Mayor Kennedy O'Brien, who was unable to attend.

"Veterans Day is simply a very special day," Kelly said. "A national holiday where we take just a moment to honor all who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America from the Revolutionary War to present. Freedom is not free. It comes at a very high cost."

He asked everyone to pray for all who have served, especially for the men and women "now guarding the gates of freedom." He also asked them to pray for the end of all wars.

Malinconio spoke about Kolodziej's accomplishments, before introducing the guest of honor.

Kolodziej spoke about his early life in Sayreville.

He explained how his introduction to World War II came when he and his father met a woman who was crying and said "the Germans were bombing Warsaw."

"World War II had come home," he said, adding he and his father got on their knees and prayed.

He also spoke about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and gave some statistics about the war.

He said except for programs like this, there are not many that remember.

The event culminated with the singing of "America the Beautiful." The group then gathered outside to watch a 21-gun salute and listened as Ray Skarzynski performed Taps. Refreshments were served after the event.

"It's important for these children to understand the sacrifices these people made and the history that goes behind it — from the littlest grades to the oldest children in the building and they do understand," Malinconio said. "We don't want our students to forget. We want them to understand history and the importance of history and everything that goes along with it."

Students also made Veterans Day cards for veterans at the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison. She said they also make cards for veterans at Christmas and in the spring.

"I think the program was very emotional, especially for people who have relatives that served," eighth-grader Nawal Panjwani said. "I think it was a great way to show our gratitude to the people who fought and risked their lives or did pass away. Some don't get the recognition for the wonderful things they did. It's our way to show our thanks to them."

### **Our Lady of Victories celebrates Veterans Day**

The students of Our Lady of Victories School also conducted their annual Veterans Day Program. The veterans attended a luncheon in which they shared lunch with the student who invited them. Patriotic songs and poems were performed by the students in an assembly, teacher Betty Bowes said.

The Middle School students incorporated technology in their production of "Just One Candle," a song for peace which pictured students passing candles while the background scenery changed picturing landmarks around the world, such as the Great Wall of China, the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, and the Christ the Redeemer statue, Bowes said.

All students submitted a picture of someone in their family who served in the armed forces and introduced the photo adding nice messages such as "Thank you for your service, Pop, Pop."

The Rev. James Ryan, pastor of Our Lady of Victories Church, welcomed each veteran and led the Flag salute.

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