

# 2000 grad and Marine Corps veteran speaks at school's annual ceremony

By Gail Heinsohn For Chatham Courier | Posted: Wednesday, May 28, 2014 12:23 pm

NEW LEBANON — On Friday, for the fourth year, New Lebanon Jr./Sr. High School honored veterans in a ceremony that Principal Matt Klafehn said is “unique” to the school.

Uniformed members of American Legion Post 1236 and James E. Callahan Vietnam Veterans Chapter 65 served as Color Guard, presenting and retiring the colors. The Vietnam veterans also performed a ceremony honoring prisoners of war and those missing in action. The high school band played a medley that saluted each branch of the military, with veterans of each asked to stand when their theme was played. And the high school chorus, about 60 members strong, performed “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother” and “Song for the Unsung Hero.”

High school senior Connor Feathers led the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by Samantha Bergdoll singing of the national anthem. Klafehn added that the school will miss her vocal ability after she graduates in June.

Members of the National Honor Society demonstrated the correct way to fold the American flag accompanied by a description of the reason for each fold.

Guest speaker Lee Godfroy, a Marine Corps veteran and present New York State Trooper who graduated from the school in 2000, told the assemblage that service to the country had a long history in his family. His great-great-grandfather served in the French Army, he said. His great-grandfather served under General Pershing, with many additional members serving over the years as well.

He was “taught by [his] family to give back,” said Godfroy, who enlisted when he was too young for the Marines to accept him, so he had to wait.

He was in North Carolina when terrorists struck the World Trade Center, he said. His mother awakened him with a phone call, informing him and making sure that he was safe. Shortly thereafter, he was told that he would be sent to the Persian Gulf.

He went to Spain, Italy and Turkey, then to the Gulf, where he “loaded ordnance onto our planes,” he said. After that, “we returned to our families with open arms. There’s no place like home.”

Thanking all veterans, Godfroy said, “Freedom isn’t free. Don’t take it for granted. You have to work for the things you want.” He also advised the group to “do the right thing, even when no one is looking,” and reminded them that “United we stand; divided we fall.”

His service was “a million-dollar experience that prepared [him] for the outside world,” but if the

students were to choose to enlist, Godfroy said he recommends “that you choose another branch of the services and learn something that you can do when you get out.”

The Marines, he added, get “hand-me-down gear from the Army.” They must “do more with less. Adapt and overcome; that’s the Marine’s motto,” he said.

He urged anyone with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or anyone who knows someone who has it, to reach out. “There’s always help out there and a person to talk to,” he said.

On this day, “our hearts go out to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and their families,” concluded Godfroy.

The program included a video thanking veterans and a slide presentation of graduates and staff members and their families who have served in the armed forces. Student Evan Burgess ended the program with a rendition of “Taps.”

Members of the Introduction to Foods course hosted a reception following the program.

*To reach Gail Heinsohn, email [gheinsohn@fairpoint.net](mailto:gheinsohn@fairpoint.net).*