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Post students gather for Freedom Walk

Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

Unified School District 207 conducted its 10th annual Freedom Walk to Normandy Field Sept. 11, honoring those who lost their lives in 2001, recognizing the valor of first responders on that day, and celebrating those currently serving in the military.

USD 207 Superintendent Dr. Keith Mispagel said all four schools and the Leavenworth High School Junior ROTC Color Guard participate in the tradition each year.

“Freedom Walks were started in 2005 by Pentagon employees to honor the lives of those lost on Sept. 11, 2001,” Mispagel said. “Freedom Walks have now become a way to renew our commitment to freedom and honor all who help us maintain this freedom.”

Mispagel said the event has highlighted veterans of World War II and the Vietnam War in past years. He said the 2017 event honored the community’s international partners.

“There are 91 countries represented at Fort Leavenworth this year — the highest number ever — and many of them have family members attending our schools,” Mispagel said. “Also marking their 55th anniversary as a sister city to Leavenworth, Kan., and with us today, are international representatives from Wagga Wagga, Australia.”

USD 207 Board President Myron Griswold welcomed attendees and special guests. He said the number of people in attendance was encouraging.

“Today marks the district’s 10th annual Freedom Walk to honor the memory of those killed in the (Sept. 11) attacks,” Griswold said. “We also recognize the selfless service and sacrifice of countless Americans and those of our comrades in arms from around the world.”

Students from each of the four on-post schools read essays on what freedom means to them. Presenting essays were sixth-graders Allison Geisler from Bradley Elementary School, Josiah McDanel from Eisenhower Elementary School and Roslyn Vaughn from MacArthur Elementary School, as well as ninth-grader Samantha Lendo from Patton Junior High School.

“Each school in the district held contests where students wrote on the theme of what freedom means to me,” said SuAnn Grant, USD 207 deputy superintendent. “The winner served as a representative from each school and was chosen to present the selected essays at the event.”

See page B2 for student essays.

Guest speaker Col. Edward Bohnemann, Combined Arms Center chief of staff, said the four student essays inspired him. He said federal law established Patriot Day in memory of the people killed in the 2001 attacks.

“On this date and at about this time 16 years ago, four hijacked planes flew into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one crashed in a field in Pennsylvania,” Bohnemann said. “Since that day our country has never been the same.”

Bohmann said the United States and its allies remain engaged in armed conflicts overseas since those attacks. He said the American flag is flown at half staff to commemorate the lives lost.

“Fort Leavenworth is known as a place where soldiers come to develop and hone their skills to lead soldiers and solve complex problems,” Bohnemann said. “I am grateful to USD 207 for taking this opportunity to remember the events of 2001 and to honor those who have answered the nation’s call to duty.”

Army spouse Stacia Bennett, whose husband is Command and General Staff College student Capt. Michael Bennett, said they have three daughters in USD 207 schools and enjoy being members of the Fort Leavenworth community. She said the events of 2001 directly affected members of her family.

“We are here to support the Freedom Walk and pay our respects to everyone who lost their lives,” Bennett said. “And we want to show our appreciation to everyone serving in the military for standing up and being brave.”

Suzy Roy, spouse of CGSC student Air Force Maj. Mike Roy, said her family is originally from the Kansas City area and have been on post since June. She was attending as a volunteer with her daughter’s elementary school class and said the schools on post are great.

“This is our first experience with schools on a military base and we are impressed,” Roy said. “Sixteen years ago, I was still in college. So, to have our daughter be a part of something as historically educational as this event is fantastic.”



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Students from Patton Junior High School and Eisenhower Elementary School walk to Normandy Field for the Unified School District 207 Freedom Walk Sept. 11. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

Active-duty members of the Fort Leavenworth community also attended the Freedom Walk. In addition to students, faculty and family members, Col. Danilo Alencar, the Brazilian liaison officer to CAC, and Lt. Col. Carlos Osses, the Chilean liaison officer to CAC, gave their impressions of the event.

Alencar said he was grateful for the invitation. He said it was essential that the American people remember the history of Sept. 11 in a constructive manner such as the ceremony.

“It was inspiring to hear the American children talk about freedom,” Alencar said. “It is important for them to learn the history because none of the children attending here today are 16 years old. They will not know of such sacrifices unless we teach them.”

Osses echoed Alencar and said he was honored to attend as well. He spoke of the close relationship between his country and the United States.

“The Chilean Army has had a liaison officer at CAC and students at CGSC for over 20 years,” Osses said. “The remembrance at the focus of the ceremony today is a significant part of history, and it is honorable to stand with the United States in recognizing all who keep freedom alive.”

“It is important to remember this history both tangibly and respectfully,” Mispagel said. “It’s also important to continually acknowledge the date as a day of service and remembrance.”