

OVERDUE RECOGNITION

Vietnam vets feted locally for service

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BEDFORD TOWNSHIP — When Vietnam veterans returned home, they faced an atmosphere in which anti-war sentiment was so strong they were typically were advised not to wear a uniform in public.

As the events of that time hit their 50-year mark, attitudes have softened. Even while the World War II generation before them are being remembered through special events and programs, there are renewed efforts to honor American veterans who served in the military during the 1960s and 1970s.

That's the background for a series of lapel-pinning Vietnam anniversary ceremonies that is taking place across Michigan. The first, an event in Lansing, had an attendance of nearly 2,000. Because of the success of that event, and also the realization that not everyone who wished to attend could make the trip, there has been a series of spinoff "hometown" ceremonies.

Two of them took place Monday in Monroe County at Veterans of Foreign Wars halls — nearly 100 people attended the luncheon at Lambertville Post 9656; and about 300 filled the hall of Monroe Post 1138 during an afternoon program.

The official gift was a round pin with an eagle's head and the inscriptions "Vietnam War



— Monroe News photos by TOM HAWLEY

Jim Soldwish (above) of Petersburg, who served in the Army, 1969-70, is pinned by Michigan Senate Majority Floor Leader Mike Kowall at Monday's ceremony recognizing the county's Vietnam War-era veterans in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the war at Lambertville Post 9656, Veterans of Foreign Wars, hall. More than 200 people took part in a similar event at Monroe Post 1138, Veterans of Foreign Wars (left), including Curt Ellison of Monroe who served in the Air Force, 1969-70; he was pinned by state Sen. Dale Zorn, R-Ida.

Veteran" and "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You." In addition, each veteran also was given a bumper sticker and poster showcasing his or her branch of service during that era.

State Senate Majority Floor Leader Mike Kowall, who came up with the idea, co-sponsored the programs in Monroe County with state Sen. Dale

Zorn, R-Ida. He explained that during an event in Lansing honoring World War II veterans, his staff realized the charter bus driver for the older veterans was himself a veteran from the 1960s. Then they started brainstorming what to do for that generation.

"We take a great deal of pride and respect for the Vietnam veterans," Sen. Kowall said.

"Thank you for your service, thank you for your sacrifice. A grateful nation can never repay the debt it owes you. Welcome home, gentlemen, welcome home," he said to a round of applause.

Most of the veterans attending the Lambertville event wore hats, shirts or jackets indicat-

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Veterans (cont.)

ing their military branch, years of service or veteran service organization membership.

Some were accompanied by family members and friends, such as Ron Boehme, a retired Army lieutenant colonel. He is a Bedford High School graduate and former Bedford

Township resident now living in Toledo. His wife, Donna, and one of his children, Nancy Rasky, came to the program.

As wife and daughter watched the veterans line up for the presentations, Mrs. Boehme related some of the stories about their travels and life as a career military family, adding that the family was

glad they learned about this event.

"A little pat on the back always goes a long way," she said.

Another family group attending was that of Army veteran Ronald Alcock, who served a year in Vietnam during his 1969-1971 service; and his brother, Clark Alcock, who had both Army and

Air Force experience from 1956-1965, all stateside.

Kathy Thomas of Lambertville wore a jacket honoring her late husband, who was an Air Force staff sergeant, as she met and spoke with the area veterans.

"It just means a lot for someone to say 'thank you' for his service," she said.