

Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw
January 6, 2012

The month of December is well known as a time of celebration, family traditions and community happenings. Many cities and towns organize parades, toy drives and meals for the less fortunate. In Amesbury, there is one tradition, now eleven years old, which stands apart from the others; the "Support the Troops Christmas Dinner and Reception." Organized by VFW Post 2016 of Amesbury/Newburyport, the traditional event was held at the Holy Family Parish Hall on Thursday December 22nd and was an inspirational time for those attending. Thanks to unusually mild weather, nearly 200 guests had no problem filling the Pariah Hall.

The night's festivities began with a compilation of Christmas tunes performed by the Cashman School Chorus, under the direction of Mrs. Beth Cavalier and Mrs. Leslie Barnaby. The children took to the stage and certainly brought the crowd into the mood of the season. Chief Dave Touhey, USN Retired, welcomed the guests and introduced the Aleppo Shriners and Amesbury Police Honor Guard, who posted our Nation's colors. Retired Army First Sergeant Stan Kardek led a salute to our Flag with the Pledge of Allegiance and Retired Amesbury Police Sergeant Dan Cleary sang our National Anthem. Fr. Mike Farrell of Holy Family Parish gave the invocation and VFW Post 2016 Commander, Bob Smith, provided greetings. Congressman John Tierney and his wife Patrice were honored guests and the Congressman shared sincere thanks to all those who are serving or have served our Nation. USAF Lt. Colonel and Amesbury Mayor, Thatcher Kezer III also welcomed guests on behalf of our community. The joy of the evening was also brighter as the war in Iraq was now over! There was also a special treat as Dennis "Ski" Iworsky was honored for his work with the Post newsletter, which once again finished first in the Nation!

Following a delicious meal, prepared by a dedicated kitchen crew, SPC Jillian Hoiseth stood before the crowd as the evening's guest speaker. A 2011 Afghanistan Veteran, she shared a wonderful slide show and emotional memories from her experiences with her detachment. Her work with the women and children of Afghanistan, especially through teaching them to read and building schools, truly was amazing. Sadly, we too seldom see the human side of war and lose track of our goals to help those in need. A child's smile is universal and it was heartwarming to see smiles on the faces of the children interacting with SPC Hoiseth and her fellow troops. The evening's ceremony came to a close following a tribute to recently deceased Post members, the introduction of current Post Officers as well as active servicemen and servicewomen attending. Each received applause and a well-deserved salute from the retired military men and women in the crowd.

Several donors provided funding to make the Dinner and Reception possible, including the following:
Newburyport Five Cents Savings Bank, Provident Bank, Institution For Savings, Amesbury Police Officers' Association, Eugene Twombly DAV Post 40, American Legion Post 187, Challenge Engineering. Gould Insurance and the Amesbury Polish Club.

As we begin a new year, filled with worries about work, schedules, family obligations and making ends meet; it's easy to lose track of all we have. We can attend the Church of our

choosing, read whatever newspaper we'd like, support any political candidate and speak on issues without fear of incarceration. Why do we enjoy these freedoms? It's because of the many dedicated servicemen and women standing guard across the world and the veterans who have answered the call throughout the history of our nation. It's also because of the family and community support given to keep our Country free and safe.

This Christmas, I happened to catch several stories on the news of soldiers returning home to their families and communities. Common in each story were tears, hugs, thank-yous, smiles and more tears. The gatherings spanned generations, ranging from grandparents to newborns, everyone with glistening eyes at the sight of their loved one. Sights and such stories truly place things into perspective on the scale of importance in our lives. What truly matters are our families, our communities and our liberties; the rights we enjoy to raise our families, grow in our communities and exercise our freedoms. On December 22nd, our community got together to say a simple thank you to our active and veteran servicemen and women for securing the many blessings we enjoy every day.