

Local schools earn honors for recognizing vets

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Gothenburg and Cozad schools are among† more than 200 Nebraska schools who are being recognized by Secretary of State John Gale for hosting Veterans Day events this year.

Teachers say these events continue to be well received by students, their communities and more importantly, local veterans. Many schools invite servicemen and women to share their experiences during those programs.

Gothenburg's program honored veterans at a program that included a variety of activities. Patriotic songs were played by the band and sung by students. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Second graders made cards for the veterans and handed them out. Veterans and their families were treated to lunch.

Veteran Jack Ostergard spoke to the assembly about veterans' efforts in the Korean War, which is often called the forgotten war.

"They can be quite moving for those in attendance," Gale said. "It's really something for those veterans to see how young people respond to their stories. It's a very public way for our communities to say, 'Thank you.'"

"I'm always inspired by the variety of programs that the schools put together," Gale said. "We provide a detailed and helpful template that schools can follow on our website. But many schools go above and beyond in their planning. My office heard from several schools that served either breakfast or lunch to the veterans who attended their programs."

Gale sponsors the Honor a Veteran program which encourages schools to host Veterans Day events as a way to promote civics education as well as recognize the contributions and sacrifices of veterans.

"In 2011, 157 schools took part in the program," explained Gale. "This year we saw quite a leap in participation. That's very encouraging and I hope that even more schools will see the benefit

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of organizing these events.”

Programs can include: the presentation of the colors, the national anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance, patriotic music, student readings and a keynote address.

Those organized this year involved other elements as well. SDA Public Schools in Syracuse awarded checks to students who had winning entries in the Voice of Democracy Essay Contest sponsored by the VFW. The program at Madison High School featured a student-made video. At Elm Creek Public Schools, students were treated to a demonstration by military dogs and their handlers from Offutt Air Force Base.

“Less than one percent of our citizens serve in our armed forces,” the secretary of state said. “They are the backbone for defending our nation as well as promoting freedom in the world. We should say ‘thank you’ every chance we get both to veterans and to those in active service.”

Gale will send certificates of appreciation to each school and classroom that notified his office that it held a 2012 Veterans Day event.