

[Ahwatukee Foothills News](#)

Travis Roemhild

Among the reds, whites and blues that flew around the gym, American war veterans watched and listened to the sights and sounds celebrating what they have done for this country.

It was Patriotic Day on Friday, April 17 at Kyrene Akimel A-al Middle School and a host of teachers, administrators, as well as local representatives John McComish, Rae Waters and Harry Mitchell were on hand for the annual event.

Veterans from the Korean War, Vietnam War and even one from World War II saw Akimel students sing and recite poetry detailing their appreciation for the soldiers.

It was the 16th annual celebration for our patriots, dating back to 1994 when Akimel A-al was named a World War II Commemorative School, the only middle school in Arizona to achieve that honor.

Also present was American Legion Post 64, stationed in Ahwatukee Foothills, who did the presentation of colors for the packed-house gymnasium and had veterans speak on their behalf.

Mitchell spoke about his own appreciation for being there.

"I am privileged and humble to be here today on this special day," he told the crowd. "School is where patriotism starts."

During the "Armed Forces Salute," dozens of war veterans that were at the gym stood to raucous applause as each branch of the military heard their own medley performed by the Akimel Wind Ensemble.

Tom Smith, retired United States Marine Corps Lt. Col., told a story about when he was injured while fighting in the Korean War.

"(In the hospital) they put up a list and said anyone who wanted to go back to Korea, put your name on here," Smith said. "Later that week, there was one name on there. Then another and another. By the end of the week the list was full."

Many of the veterans offered similar stories of patriotism. One of those, 94-year-old Ahwatukee Foothills resident Charles Roloff, was also honored during the ceremony. But it was not his first time and probably not the last.

"I've been coming to (Patriotic Day) since the beginning and it gets better every year," said Roloff, who flew Navy PBYS off the Atlantic Coast during WWII. "The kids are always great."

A moment of silence kicked off the celebration and hit home for some who have been touched by the casualties of war. At the front of the stage, a table with four chairs and four place settings sat to signify and remember those of the four military branches who have lost their lives fighting against the evil of the world and for the United States of America.