Written by Chris Lee
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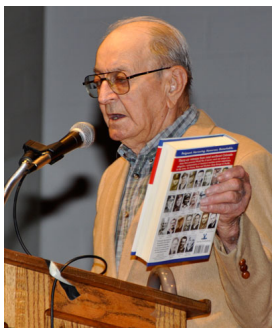
World War II veterans highlighted the Veterans Day program held at Holyoke High School Monday afternoon, Nov. 12.

Emcee Steve Millage found it appropriate to include WWII veterans because Holyoke recently lost two of them in Deane Anderson and Bob Owens. “They’re all in their 80s and I think it’s important to hear their story,” Millage said. “They all did what their government asked them to do.”

John Vasa, who served in the Army from 1942-1945, encouraged the students in the audience to speak with the veterans close to them and have them write down their experiences.



**John Vasa holds up a book titled “Sterling’s Heroes” during the Veterans Day program Monday afternoon. He encouraged the audience to pick up a copy of the book and give it a read.**

**—Enterprise photo**

Vasa said even though some veterans don't enjoy talking about their time spent serving their country, it is important to get the information recorded either on paper or on a tape recorder so generations down the line will know the family history.

Vasa also had a copy of "Sterling's Heroes," which outlines interviews with 24 veterans and their experiences. "It's interesting reading. There's a chapter on each one of them," Vasa noted. "I highly recommend this book."

Richard Brown closed out the program by sharing a short background of his experience serving the United States of America.

"I'm half first-generation American," Brown told the audience. He said his dad was born in Nebraska and his mom was born in Italy. He remembers always trying to get his grandmother to teach him Italian. "She wouldn't do it," he noted. "She always left me with the same answer. You're lucky to be an American boy. And she was right," he noted.

Brown entered the service right after high school when he chose the Army.

Brown shared a story of how he carried a silver dollar with him during his service. It was given to him by his grandmother the day before he left for his service. "Everybody knew I had a silver dollar," Brown said.

He said when he got off the ship at Okinawa, he didn't have his silver dollar; he had lost it.

After 14 months overseas, he headed back to California to Camp Beale. He remembers walking down the sidewalk and hearing, "Hey Browny."

He looked around and there was one of the guys he had trained with in the Philippines.

“I thought I might run into you sometime,” his friend said. “Remember the day you left and you lost your silver dollar?” Brown said he did. “It was under your bunk, I thought I’d run into you.”

“And I got it back,” Brown said as he held up his silver dollar Monday afternoon to a cheering crowd.

**Richard Brown holds up his silver dollar that he carried with him while serving in the Army. Brown highlighted some of his experiences Monday afternoon, Nov. 12 during the annual Veterans Day program at HHS.**

**—Enterprise photo**

Brown said 16 million served in WWII and there are currently only about two million left. He said they are dying at a rate of 741 a day.

“I know that when we step out, we’re leaving the country in good hands,” Brown said as he acknowledged the students in front of him.

Four students shared their Voice of Democracy essays during Monday’s program. The winners in this year’s contest were Matt Wilcox first, Savanna Krueger second, Erin Vieselmeyer third and Logan Tharp fourth. The topic of this year’s contest was whether the Constitution of the United States is still relevant today or not.

Millage encouraged the underclassmen to participate in the contest in years to come. He said they had 20 entries this year, which allows them to  send two to districts. Had four more students entered, three could’ve been sent to the district competition.

In addition to the speakers, Holyoke High School band played two songs, “You’re a Grand Old Flag” and “America, the Beautiful.” Eva Penzing began Monday’s program by singing the national anthem, and Jack Wieland performed taps to close out the program.

**2012 Voice of Democracy essay winners are pictured from left, Logan Tharp fourth, Erin Vieselmeyer third,**
**Savanna Krueger second and Matt Wilcox first. The four students from Phillips County shared their essays**
**Monday during the annual Veterans Day program.**

**—Enterprise photo**

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