

Old and new heroes mingle as military recruits are honored

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CASTRO VALLEY -- Less than a week after the nation paid its Memorial Day tribute to fallen military service members, Sunday was a day for new heroes.

Almost 70 recruits from the Bay Area were honored for the service they've chosen to render to their nation. Saluting Military Recruits, a new nonprofit veteran-run organization, held its first ceremony Sunday at the Castro Valley Center for the Arts, with soon-to-be soldiers, seamen, airmen, Marines and guardsmen accepting certificates of appreciation and proudly posing for pictures.

They met awe-inspiring role models: a Pearl Harbor veteran, and a soldier who received a medal Sunday for an act of heroism right here at home. But they said these young men and women are the true inspirations.

"You'll work for what you're going to get," said Navy veteran Mickey Ganitch, 93, of San Leandro, who was aboard the USS Pennsylvania when Pearl Harbor was attacked Dec. 7, 1941. "But if you work you can advance, and there's no limit to what you can gain in the service. ... You people are the future of our country, so take care of it."

Staff Sgt. Jason Ramsey, 36, of Alameda, was presented the Soldier's Medal, awarded by the U.S. Army to someone who demonstrates heroism outside of armed conflict. Ramsey, who has served for 18 years, helped rescue a woman from a car that went into the Oakland estuary last June.

But while modest about his own heroism -- he said he was being "recognized for something

I just thought needed to be done" -- Ramsey was more effusive about the young recruits.

"I really appreciate their effort to stand up when a lot of other people choose not to," he said. "It shows a lot of character."

Taylor Erts, 18, of Pleasanton, said he chose to enlist because it's a proud family tradition: His father, an Army lieutenant colonel, served in Iraq.

Ramandeep Kaur, 17, of Rodeo, said she wants to "serve the country, try something new." Long Le, 18, of El Sobrante, said he enlisted to "serve the country, protect my friends and family, and get an education, too." And Micael Segal, 23, of Oakland, said he wants to learn leadership skills and discipline that will help him start a business.

"I give them a lot of respect for their courage," said U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Velma Quinata, who recruited these four and accompanied them to Sunday's ceremony.

Saluting Military Recruits Chairman Michael L. Emerson told recruits that "what you're about to embark upon will be one of the most amazing and hard and fulfilling experiences of your life."

Emerson, of Hayward, later said he formed this new organization and planned Sunday's ceremony because "when I joined the service, nobody even knew I left ... but it really changes your life." Recruits and their families should be told that the community appreciates their commitment, he said, and he plans to make this an annual event.

Local lawmakers praised the recruits.

"It is the sacrifice of the few that provides the freedom for the many in this country," Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-Pleasanton, told them. "I salute our young recruits. ... It's a very brave thing that you're doing."

State Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, said when she looks at the new recruits' faces, she sees her father, a World War II veteran "who went off and very faithfully served his country," first abroad and then at home in his community. "Godspeed ... and thank you from the bottom of my heart," she said.

Photos to follow by Jim Sevens/Bay Area News Group



Pic 01 - Some of the 67 new recruits say the Pledge of Allegiance at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif., on Sunday, June 2, 2013. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic - 02 New recruit Adrian White, left, is congratulated by Pearl Harbor survivor Mickey Ganitch, 93, of San Leandro at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif., on Sunday, June 2, 2013. Ganitch spoke at the ceremony honoring 67 new enlistees. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic 03 - The 67 new recruits, their recruiters and honored guest pose for a group picture at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif., on Sunday, June 2, 2013. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic 04 - Michael Emerson, center, chairman of Saluting Military Recruits, jokes around with new recruit, Allison Mosher, of Concord, as Sgt. Benjamin Conrad, left, and Brandon Melton, right, look on, at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif. on Sunday, June 2, 2013. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic 05 - Michael Emerson, left, and Rep. Eric Swalwell, right, award Staff Sgt. Jason Ramsey the Soldier's Medal for heroism during the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif. on Sunday, June 2, 2013. Ramesy rescued a woman from her submerged vehicle after she crashed it into the estuary in Oakland last year. The event honored 67 new recruits. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic 06 - Michael Emerson, left, salutes as a Coast Guard color guard presents the colors at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif., on Sunday, June 2, 2013. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)



Pic 07 - Taylor Erts displays his certificate of appreciation he received at the Saluting Military Recruits ceremony in Castro Valley, Calif., on Sunday, June 2, 2013. (Jim Stevens/Bay Area News Group)