

# Grafton Elementary School teaching students value of freedom through veterans

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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GRAFTON - Grafton Mayor Ric Eberlin is also a fourth grade teacher - at least for the remainder of this school year, as he is retiring soon.

Eberlin has hosted an event for veterans near Veterans Day for years while teaching within the Jersey Community School District. He is finishing his teaching career at Grafton Elementary School, where this year's program was held. The purpose of the program, Eberlin said in his greeting Thursday morning, was to educate children regarding the sacrifices made by veterans as well as to honor veterans in the community.

To do this, Eberlin's program contained a mixture of student-driven learning and community members who have served educating. The event's speaker, Lou Lenkman, is a retired Chief Warrant Officer III from the United States Army. Eberlin said he has known Lenkman for years through the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and invited her to speak to students, veterans and parents regarding her service.



"Girls were still considered an oddity in many jobs, including the one I was on," Lenkman said.

She displayed photographs of her when she began her service as a helicopter mechanic in 1975 - dressed in a white shirt and a skirt. She said, upon her first day reporting to

duty at helicopter mechanic schooling, her drill sergeant marched her more than a mile across the base to the quartermaster's office to attain her required uniform for the position.

"Looking back, I realized he didn't know what to do, and I didn't know what to do, so we marched there, and he yelled at me the whole way," she recalled. "While equal rights had been implemented before then, the Army had yet to catch on."

Lenkman said women's roles in the United States armed forces, including the addition of women into special forces.

Later photographs provided by Lenkman showed her in full fatigues instructing soldiers how to rappel from helicopters using ropes.

Before Lenkman spoke, however, four students from Eberlin's fourth grade class, Hailey Feldman, Payton Mooney, Elise Feddersen and Sophia Zinn performed a small play regarding what constitutes a veteran.

A veteran, the young women told the crowd, is not just someone who fought in a war, not just someone who died and is not just a man. Veterans, they concluded after consulting their dictionary, are people who have served in any capacity in the armed forces, including Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard.

Students from kindergarten through fourth grade then sang patriotic favorites, *God Bless the USA* and *You're a Grand Old Flag*, before Eberlin gave a video presentation of veterans related to students, which featured each veteran's photo, branch of service, and years of service. All of them were friends and relative of students and staff.

The event concluded after the Grafton American Legion Post #648 Color Guard played Taps on a bugle and marched the colors from the school's gymnasium.

Previous to that, Eberlin delivered a short lesson of the history of Taps, and how it began as a derivative to a French military tune calling soldiers to wind down activities and extinguish fires, and was appropriated for American use in the Civil War, originally by Union soldiers, until it was taken by the Confederacy as well - even being used for the funeral of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson.

It has since been played at American military funerals since 1874.

