

Students to offer veterans their service

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COVENTRY — Three years ago Valerie Bishop had two students in her class that had parents that were deployed overseas to Iraq.

The students, she said, were obviously saddened by their parents' absence and she wanted to do something to "make them feel better."

The second grade teacher at Blackrock Elementary school invited two local veterans, Commander Robert Hartley and Infantryman Joseph Meuiner, both Korean War Veterans, to her classroom to speak to her students about military life and how it affects families and life after war.

The experience enlightened her class, she said, and also made the students whose parents were away feel some sort of comfort in knowing that their parents weren't alone.

The experience was "so special" to her and her class, she said, that she decided to make it a yearly ritual and also expand on the idea.

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Valerie Bishop
Blackrock Elementary School teacher

Since that time three years ago, Hartley and Meuiner have come back to the school several times to talk with Bishop's students. They were there this week talking with her students about "what is like to be in a scary place" where a war is talking place, about what it was like being on the front line as infantrymen.

Meuiner told the students he went to Korea as a rifleman and then was ordered to operate a machine gun and then a bazooka.

Hartley told the students about the bitter cold temperatures that they also had to endure in addition to combat. He said temperatures during his

time at war dropped well below 30 and 40 degrees and many soldiers died of frostbite before they even encountered battles.

They also told the students about the growing number of orphans in Korea during the war. They told the students there were half a million orphans in Korea at the time.

From these discussions other events have blossomed. Bishop said she and her students have organized a number of other events that were inspired by that first encounter with the military duo.

Last year Bishop said she and her students, with the help of the entire school community, created and sold cookbooks to benefit the veterans. She said the fundraising event brought in \$700.

Earlier this year the students at Blackrock Elementary School held an event known as Nickels for our Nations Heroes, during which they raised \$1,400 for Korean War Veterans.



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Commander Robert Hartley and Infantryman Joseph Meuiner, both Korean War Veterans, speak to second grade students in Valerie Bishop's class at Black Rock Elementary School.

Blackrock students to pay tribute to vets with dinner

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"The program took off so much after that first visit three years ago, we just couldn't stop doing it," Bishop said. "The kids just look forward to it every year."

Bishop said she also felt that it was important to continue with the veteran history lesson because she said the subject is not exactly part of the students' curriculum, but a lesson that she doesn't want them to miss out on.

"The kids knew about veterans in

terms that they exist, but they didn't really know anything more than that about them," she said. "They didn't know how many of them there were or of how extreme the sacrifices were that these brave men and women made and continue to make as veterans.

"They didn't realize that it was their sacrifices that give us what we have today and if these kids are not learning about that now, there will be no one left to carry on that tradition of how important veterans are," she said.

This month Bishop said her class traditionally steps up the level of patriotism.

She said earlier this month the students wrote original pieces of literature about veterans and why people are and should be proud of them.

They also spent some time this past week before Hartley and Meuner's visit singing and reading about the country.

This Saturday the entire school helped organize a yard sale at the school. Teachers, administrators, parents, students and others from the

community donated various items to the yard sale to help to increase the amount of money brought in. Bishop said they received a multitude of donations that included everything from books and toys to puzzles, movies and furniture. All of the money raised, Bishop said, will be sent to the Veteran's hospital.

This week's events have all been in preparation for the culminating event, Bishop said. Each year in May the school holds the annual veterans appreciation dinner. She said Alan Shawn Feinstein funded the dinner

this year. She said he donated \$1,000 so that Nino's would cater the event.

She said students wrote letters inviting various veterans, some family members and some from the community to come to their school for the annual dinner. She said the students will be escorting the veterans to their dinner and serving them their meals. It is, she said, a nice way to pay tribute to them men and women who have served their country.

The dinner will take place on Thursday at 6 p.m. in the cafeteria at Blackrock Elementary School.