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Perris Pays Tribute to Veterans

More than 1,000 Perris residents came out to witness the annual Veterans Day Parade along historic D Street on Nov. 8, a celebration of the military that included marching bands, a flyover of vintage planes, military vehicles, rifle teams and cannon-firing demonstrations.

"A Tribute to Old Glory" was the theme for this year's parade, and grand marshal Buford A. Johnson served as a living example of that slogan.

Johnson, 87, served with the Tuskegee Airmen during and after World War II and along with the other African-Americans who formed the group helped break down racial barriers and destroy stereotypes about black soldiers, paving the way for an integrated U.S. military. During breakfast at American Legion Post 595, Johnson dispensed some advice that could be summarized in three words: good, better, best.

"Never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best," Johnson said. "I am humbled and honored to be grand marshal of this parade. It's a great feeling."



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers chatted with Parade Grand Marshal Buford Johnson, a member of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen.

Johnson joined the Tuskegee Airmen in 1945 while still a teen-ager. The Airmen were an all-black outfit formed to show Americans and the world that African-Americans could serve as combat pilots. The unit earned the respect of all American troops for their outstanding record of protecting American bombers over Nazi-occupied Europe during the latter stages of World War II.

Johnson worked as a mechanic on several aircraft and became the first African-American jet mechanic when he was assigned to maintain the F-80 C Shooting Star. Johnson retired from the service in 1966 and the Riverside Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen is named in his honor. Over the years, the airmen have been recognized through movies and local and national awards. Among the award bestowed to the Tuskegee Airmen was the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award presented by the U.S.

Several members of the Perris City Council and local veterans stopped by to congratulate Johnson as did Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley and Harold "Buzz Waltz," the American Legion's 5th Area Vice Commander.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers said it was a "special honor" to meet Johnson, who she called "a true hero of our nation."

"Perris is a community that recognizes our veterans are heroes," she said. "We are 100 percent behind our veteran population."



City Councilman-elect David Starr Rabb and City Manager Richard Belmudez exchange greetings at American Legion Post 595 prior to the start of the City's annual Veterans Day Parade.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch said the City's commitment to military veterans dates back more than a century. The remains of 13 Civil War soldiers rest in the Perris Valley Cemetery. Perris residents have served in every war since the City was incorporate and continue in far-flung missions today.

"This community has always supported its veterans," said Busch, who served as a radar operator in the Navy. "We can never honor our veterans enough for all they have given to us."

City Councilman-elect David Starr Rabb, who served as a Navy gunner's mate in the Global War on Terror, called Johnson a trailblazer "who paved the way for people like me to get elected to public office. He said that he looks forward to serving veterans as an elected official.

"I am looking forward as a veteran to serve our veterans in this area," Rabb said.

City Councilwoman-elect Tonya Burke called Perris "a community rich in history and resources" that celebrates its veterans.

"This parade is a wonderful way to honor our veterans and I honored to be part of it," she said.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilwoman-elect Tonya Burke await the start of the Nov. 8 Veterans Day Parade.

City Councilman Julio Rodriguez thanked veterans for "giving all of us the chance to live healthy and safe lives."

"It's always a privilege to celebrate people who have done so much for our country," he said. "The parade is a small thing we do, but it's an important one."

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough, who has a son and daughter in uniform, addressed the crowd while driving a car with large pictures of his military twins: Andrea, serving in Germany with the Army and Schuyler, assigned to Camp Pendleton with the Marines.

"Thank you all for coming out to attend," he said. "This is about our veterans. Thank you to all who have served."

As he has for many years, Perris City Councilman Al Landers served as emcee of the parade, announcing all the entries and encouraging the audience to cheer them on. Landers knows well the sacrifice veterans have made through the years. His brother, Richard, was killed while serving with the paratroopers in Vietnam in 1965. He was 18.

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