

## VETERANS DAY November 11, 2008

### Finger Lakes Community College Veterans Day

#### Dr. Barry Culhane

Students, faculty, staff and administrators of Finger Lakes Community College, and guests, thank you! **Thank you** for the opportunity to share this special day with you. Today is Veteran's Day, a day to remember the men and women who have served our country, and are currently serving to protect our freedoms too often taken for granted.

It is a day where we actively remember our family members, our loved ones, our neighbors, and our comrades-in-arms, our friends who have dedicated part of their lives, and are willing to sacrifice life itself, to serve America in military uniform. How could we celebrate our veterans this day?

Well those of you here are doing just that by participating in this special ceremony at FLCC – where last year General McCausland spoke, and underscored the importance of the service of THREE New York veterans who have provided extraordinary service. One of those is Brian Chontosh a Marine Captain who distinguished himself in March 2003 in Iraq for which he earned the Navy Cross. A Churchville Chili high school and RIT graduate, he was selected as RIT's outstanding alum in 2006, and he has since returned to Iraq and Afghanistan, but continues to train young officers based on his real life experiences in battle. It is people like Brian and his wife and son we celebrate with gratitude.

So how can we, as citizens, celebrate our veterans beyond attending special ceremonies like this one?

- By visiting or aiding our disabled veterans...some right here in Canandaigua
- Quiet reflection of a special veteran. Your reflection is important today. One of our community leaders, Arunas Chesonis wrote a book: "*It's Not Just Business, It's Personal.*" He is right about business, and it applies to many aspects of our lives, including service to country. It is not just serving our country, it's personal.

It is not just putting on the uniform, it's personal. It is not just serving overseas, it's personal. It's not just losing a father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter to an assignment overseas for a year or more, **IT IS PERSONAL**. I am willing to say that most of you here reflect on Veterans Day about someone who touched your life personally. A comrade-in-arms, a family member, a friend. ....a member of our community. For me it is my father who served 4 years in the Army in World War II, my uncle Bill who went missing in Korea on September 27, 1952 and we are still working on closure 56 years later, my cousin Jack Gell who was killed in the battle of Ia Drang and is the 12<sup>th</sup> bollard or stainless steel post in our local Greater Rochester Vietnam Memorial. It is my friends I served with from 1969-1971 and the veterans I treated as a medic. It is the hundreds of alums from RIT who often give up or delay high paying jobs to choose service to country. ...and I am sure to you, in some way today's veterans salute **IS PERSONAL**.

- By supporting families whose loved ones are on duty overseas, and families who paid the second largest price for freedom – the loss of their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice
- By thanking a veteran – who are our veterans anyway? It could be the person standing next to you. He or she is an ordinary person, and yet an extraordinary human being, a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs. He or she is a soldier and a Savior and a sword against the darkness, and nothing more than the finest testimony on behalf of the greatest nation ever known.
- One of the positive outcomes of the Vietnam War is that our nation learned to separate the war from the warrior. Regardless of one's political opinions about war or a particular war, we must separate that from the acknowledgement of service to country.

So remember, each time you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say "THANK YOU" .

I met a man from Colorado when inventor Ray Kurzweil at RIT spoke last September. He had not served in the military, but we discovered we have

the same habit as we travel around the country of stopping young men and women in uniform in airports and simply extend our hand to say: “Thank you for your service to our country”

That's all most people need, and in most cases, it will mean more than any medals that they could have been awarded or were awarded' A moment of your time, and TWO LITTLE WORDS that mean a lot...or SEVEN little words “Thank You for your Service to Country” Saying these words results in Veterans Day becoming **PERSONAL** for you and that veteran.

It is a choice to serve our country in uniform today. These veterans give us this greatest gift of all – the gift of freedom! These are the people who dedicate their lives so we may speak freely, practice religion freely, vote, associate with whom we want, and experience all the freedoms we have under our Constitution and Bill of Rights.....because over the centuries, since we formed as a free America in 1776, there have been young men and women willing to give life itself for our freedoms and rights under the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

So today we honor our veterans who give us these freedoms, and who ask nothing in the return, except our respect. These men and women who make up the family of warriors who have walked point for America in harm's way, bearing the burden of service to our country.

Thanksgiving is just 16 days away – and visions of turkey and pumpkin pie abound – at least for my kids. It is a day when we pause to give thanks for the things we have.....Veterans Day is a day we pause to give thanks to the people who serve in uniform to protect our freedoms. For us today, their willingness to serve and sacrifice is not a distant memory, **IT IS PERSONAL**.

**God Bless You and God Bless America!**

Barry R. *Culhane*