

November is a special month for giving thanks, and a good place to start is by expressing gratitude to Johnson County veterans on Nov. 11, Veterans Day.

What started 90 years ago as Armistice Day, dedicated to the cause of world peace and honoring World War I veterans, is now a day to honor the sacrifices, bravery, and contributions of all veterans during peacetime or wartime.

Johnson County residents are invited to join the 22nd annual Johnson County Veterans Day observance at 10:00 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 11, at the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial, Antioch Park, 6501 Antioch Road, Merriam. The ceremony, sponsored by Johnson County government, salutes all veterans, past and present; commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War; and honors 57 Johnson County soldiers killed or missing in action in Vietnam. They came from all walks of life and from cities throughout Johnson County. The youngest to die was 19; the oldest was 47. Four are listed as missing in action.

Our keynote speaker this year will be Lt. Col. Francis “Duke” Hester, a Vietnam War veteran and the mobilization readiness officer for the Kansas Army National Guard. His military service spans more than three decades and his decorations include the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star.

The 2008 event will feature patriotic music performed by the Shawnee Mission South High School Band and a choir from Crestview Elementary School, the Johnson County Sheriff’s Color Guard, placement of memorial wreaths by local veteran organizations, a rifle salute, the playing of “Taps,” vintage military vehicles, and the presence of the Patriot Guard.

The county’s annual Veterans Day observance began in 1987, with public services on the south steps of the Johnson County Courthouse in downtown Olathe, before moving to the Kansas National Guard Armory in west Olathe from 1995 to 2006. Last year’s event was at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Overland Park.

It is a great honor for me to take part in the annual Veterans Day ceremony as we remember the men and women who throughout our history have served our great nation so that we might live in freedom.

They have asked for so little, yet they have given so much.

They serve in the name of duty, honor, and country. All were patriots who lit the world and the nation with their fidelity and courage. They ask only for the gratitude of a nation, and they inspire the commitment of the values and ideals on which this country was founded.

They are American heroes, past and present, living and dead.

Let me close with a memory from another war memorial—a British monument in Burma that honors World War II veterans. It says so eloquently what Americans should all feel on Veterans Day and every day throughout the year:

“When you go home, tell them of us, and say for your tomorrow we gave our today.”

So, let us always honor and salute our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who served in Vietnam and bygone wars and are serving us today in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world for a better future and the protection of all Americans.

For a moment, let us pause and remember those who made possible our tomorrows.

On Veterans Day, as we do every year, let us take that moment to commend the quiet heroes of Vietnam and of all our wars. Let us give them their just recognition, appreciation, and love.

Let us never forget them.

And thank God for them.

*Annabeth.Surbaugh@jocogov.org; 913-715-0500.*

*See page x for a guide to veteran recognition ceremonies.*