

Stockton Honors Sacrifices of Those Who Serve in Military at Veterans Day Ceremonies

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Galloway, N.J. - The sacrifices of veterans, current service members and their families were honored today in three ceremonies at Stockton University.

Tom O'Donnell, assistant dean of Students and Veteran Affairs at Stockton, celebrated Stockton's national recognition as one of the best universities in the nation for veterans, and said, "Today we honor our brave men and women who protected our freedom at all costs."

Stockton today was ranked in the Top 20 four-year colleges and universities for veterans by the Military Times' "[Best for Vets: Colleges 2017](#)," and by the Online College Plan's "[Top 20 Best 4-Year Colleges for Veterans](#)."

O'Donnell noted that he will be retiring at the end of the academic year as head of the Office of Veteran Affairs, which opened in 2008. "But this will not be my last ceremony at Stockton," he said. "It's part of my DNA."

"Our great program is supported from the top down," he said, "President Harvey Kesselman has been a steadfast supporter," he noted, also citing Vice President for Student Affairs Thomasa Gonzalez, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs Dee McNeely-Greene, Dean of Students Pedro Santana and the Veterans Team, the Stockton Student Veterans Organization (SVO) and faculty mentors.

"We are proud to have our veterans succeed not only academically but when they leave and get jobs," O'Donnell said.

Provost Lori Vermeulen gave welcoming remarks honoring veterans in front of the Campus Center on behalf of President Kesselman and the university. She said Stockton's veterans have excellent graduation and retention rates, an accomplishment of which they can be proud. She also noted that her husband is a veteran of the Marine Corps

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Paul Garraty is president of the SVO and active in the Kappa Sigma fraternity's Xi Rho chapter, which works on veteran suicide prevention and homelessness as part of its Military Heroes Campaign.

"It's OK to be OK," Garraty said, urging his fellow vets to "get the care you need - it isn't a handout." But he also said veterans are strong and unified. Referring to the "polarizing" recent elections, Garraty said he had seen civilian friendships splinter - "but not amongst you - the veterans. The unity among veterans here at Stockton remains steady and immovable."

"Seize your place in history," Garraty said.

Assemblyman Chris Brown (R-Atlantic), an Army veteran of the war in Iraq who was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and Combat Infantryman Badge, was the keynote speaker.

He said, "Even though I was in law school and halfway through a semester," when he got notice he was being activated, he did not seek a deferral.

"If I didn't go, someone else would have to go," he said. "I understood that our freedom requires defense across the globe." He noted that serving overseas is also a learning experience, and he was able to finish law school when he returned.

He addressed young people who may be struggling with college debt or a tough job market, and said: "The more you believe in this great country, the more this country will do for you."

He said when he returned home he was welcomed, but that was not the case for Vietnam veterans. Despite that, most of them prevailed by getting jobs, raising children and being active citizens. "They are examples of what it means to have a love of country," he said.

Archbishop de Paulo, of the Old Catholic Confederation which represents over one million Christians in the United States, Canada and th

