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Squadron #23, American Legion Riders, U.S. Marine Corps League Detachment #783, and North Georgia Honor Guard also attended the event with members of their families, all in the name of remembrance and honor for this 72nd anniversary.

The Battle of Iwo Jima would prove to be one of the most calamitous battles in World War II as well as American history.

From Feb. 19, 1945, to March 26, 1945, American forces suffered more than 26,000 casualties on the island, and nearly 7,000 soldiers lost their lives in the service of liberty and freedom for everyone back in the states and around the world.

Scott Drummond, retired U.S. Coast Guard, began the program by welcoming all in attendance to the ceremony to remember the battle that would pave the way for the end of World War II.

"Today we are fortunate enough to have several Iwo Jima survivors with us," said Drummond. "However, today we are not only here to celebrate their sacrifices for our nation, but each and every one of our fellow brothers and sisters who have served our United States of America in uniform.

"This is not about war so much as our freedoms, liberties and opportunities provided by our constitution, our unique sovereign republic, our United States of America, and each and every American."

Charley Andrews, U.S. Navy retired, introduced Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, as well as Mike Roby, District Commander of the Georgia Veterans Service.

Commissioner Bradshaw spoke to the group briefly, sharing his support for the veteran communities and the brave men and women who have served this country.

Roby spoke on behalf of the Veterans Service, congratulating the entities involved in organizing the ceremony. He expressed extreme gratitude for the veterans who have served, both today and in years past.

"It is an honor to be here today to celebrate these great men," said Roby. "Today, we commend men who have



Commissioner Mike Roby of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Todd Kimsey of Towns County, Jack Rhodes of Murphy, North Carolina, and Clarence E. "Bud" Johnson of Towns County - all are survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



The North Georgia Honor Guard presented and retired the colors for the event at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

upheld a tradition of service that goes back to the founding of our nation, back to the great men who stepped forward to

forge a nation dedicated to the principles of liberty and justice for all.

"Those of us who have

served understand the need to defend these principles, and we answer our nation's call to do so. When the call came to combat oppression in the Pacific, these men answered.

"They faced an unbelievable challenge at Iwo Jima. They faced that challenge with courage and determination. These men were victorious and headed home to be with us today.

"We also honor those who paid the ultimate price at Iwo Jima. Their legacy of honor, courage and sacrifice will always be remembered."

Following Roby was the keynote speaker for the event, Brig. Gen. Bernard Fontaine, U.S. Army retired.

Fontaine enlisted in the military in October of 1960 after completing his education at the University of Massachusetts.

Throughout his career, Fontaine worked his way through the ranks, serving a tour in Vietnam and working in New Jersey and Georgia.

During his speech, Fontaine highlighted the efforts that lead to the Battle of Iwo Jima, beginning in July of 1942 and following the U.S. military through its progression in Japan.

According to Fontaine, the victory of Iwo Jima was the result of these decisions and mindful calculations in the years leading up to the battle in 1945.

"There are three types of veterans," said Fontaine. "The first one is the people who sign up. They deserve to be called veterans, whether they make it to the frontline or whether they don't.

"The next one is the one that's harder to talk about. I call it the survivors. This is something that I feel guilty about because I know there are better people who didn't make it. We shall never forget them.

"The third one is one that most people don't even talk about, and that is the people that stayed at home. These people who stayed home and waited for two years or three years, they are veterans also, and we better not forget it."

The ceremony ended with the laying of the memorial wreaths, followed by refreshments for all those who attended.

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A silent auction also went to benefit the Collins family

has suffered from the flu, pneumonia and a seizure, and has recently lost his hearing.

According to Collins' mother, Julie Collins, her family is extremely grateful for the outpouring of love and support from the community, and she could not even begin to thank everyone enough for all that has been done since Dakota fell ill.

"God has really blessed us and sent people out to help," said Julie. "It really has been amazing what people have been led to do for us.

"Dakota has been in a lot better spirits this week, and I think he's enjoyed being out and about.

"As far as why everything happened, the doctors don't really know right now, aside from his kidney disease. But he's still with us, and that's what is important."

Locals of all ages endured the blustery weather to participate in Saturday's cornhole tournament, coon hunt and silent auction to help raise funds for Dakota's hospital bills.

Jeremy McClure, one of the organizers for the event and the moderator for the silent auction, said that the decision to coordinate the fundraiser was a no-brainer.

"I've known the family for quite some time, and we've coon hunted together," said McClure. "This is just the right thing to do for him and for his family. It's just the right thing to do."

All items that were sold during the auction were donated by locals and businesses throughout the community.

McClure was not the only one who felt hosting the event was something that just made sense.

Ernie Harkins, who provided hamburger and hotdog plates throughout the evening, felt that coming out to help the Collins family was not even a question.

According to Harkins, if a member of the community needs help, then he will contribute in whatever way he can.

"I've been friends with the family for years," said Harkins. "The Lord told me that I needed to do something, and this is what I decided to do."

The sentiment was one felt by all who volunteered to assist in the event.

Doug Hughes, who was responsible for the cornhole tournament, attributed the abundant support, both from the volunteers and those who visited the market to participate, to the size of Union County. Hughes added that, in a bigger town, this comradery would not be found.

"I've known the Collins family for probably the last 30 years," said Hughes. "I met them coon hunting. When you live in a small community, you hear a lot about people, but you never hear anything about the Collins boys unless it's good stuff.

"They're good people, they're excellent people. There have been a lot of people come out today, and it's all to help that kid. That's what everybody is here for.

"It says a lot about the community. I would never want to live in a community bigger than this, where nobody cared about each other."

The benefit began at noon and lasted on into the evening ending with a coon hunt. Prizes were given to the First, Second and Third Place winners during the hunt.