

Handprint flag highlights Waterville Veterans Day parade

The flag, made by students at St. John Regional Catholic School, had traveled to Maine National Guard troops in Afghanistan and back.



Students, staff and parents of the St. John Regional Catholic School in Winslow carried the Hand Print flag during the Veterans Day parade in Waterville on Tuesday. **Staff photo by David Leaming**
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WATERVILLE — The Veterans Day parade kicked off Tuesday morning at the American Legion parking lot on College Avenue with a medley of patriotic tunes from the Waterville High School band and the kick-start rumble of motorcycles ridden by more than a dozen military veterans.

Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, moms, dads, kids, soldiers, police officers, firefighters and politicians all lined up waving flags in a colorful salute to the men and women who have served their country — some at great personal sacrifice.

But it was a group of young students from St. John Regional Catholic School that caught the eye and captured the hearts of parade-goers.

About 35 students from the Winslow school marched in the parade carrying a banner showing an American flag made in red and blue handprints on a field of white — all forming the Stars and Stripes.

“This is a flag that the students made with their handprints last year for the 133rd Engineering Battalion of the Maine National Guard,” school Principal Bonnie McGann said. “We sent it over to Afghanistan and every soldier signed it, and then they gave it back to us and we keep it in a special spot in our school.”

The school serves children in kindergarten through sixth grade.

McGann, herself a veteran, having retired from the Navy in 1999, said the flag exchange was a learning experience for the students who are taught patriotism, loyalty and honor. The flag was part of a large care package sent to the battalion stationed at Bagram Airfield, the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan.

“We’re out here to honor not only these veterans but all the veterans in our families,” she said.

After receiving the package, the troops displayed the flag outside their chapel and in June posed for a photograph with the flag and signed it, thanking the students for their thoughtful gesture.

Aidan Larrabee, a fifth-grader at St. John school from South China, said the flag means a lot to him and to everyone at the school.

“It shows how much we respect and how much we appreciate what they do for us — the whole American nation — to protect us and give us our dignity,” Aidan said. “There are 13 red handprints in each row; there are 50 blue handprints representing the 50 states.”

Schoolmate Brooklyn Kelly of Winslow agreed.

“It means how we represent America and how much we love the people who are serving,” she said.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 — Nov. 11 — an armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, was declared between the Allied nations, including the United States, and Germany in the First World War, then known as “the Great War.”

Commemorated as Armistice Day beginning the following year, Nov. 11 became a legal federal holiday in the United States in 1938. In the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War, Armistice Day became Veterans Day, a holiday dedicated to American veterans of all wars.

In his closing remarks following the parade Tuesday, Ernest Paradis, commander of Bourque Lanigan Post 5 of the American Legion in Waterville, said all Americans owe a great debt to the nation’s military veterans.

“It is important to remember that veterans are defending us 365 days a year,” Paradis, a Vietnam era veteran, told the assembly. “The heroism that has been demonstrated time and again by veterans from the American Revolution to the global war on terrorism is sometimes unnoticed by those of us who enjoy the security their sacrifices provided.

“Without our veterans, America would not be America. We need to serve veterans as they have served us.”

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On the other side of the world...

St. John students to display handprint flag signed by 133rd

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133rd Engineer Battalion

In June, members of the 133rd Engineer Battalion posed for a photograph with the flag and signed it, offering words of thanks for the students' thoughtful gesture.

WATERVILLE, Maine — Students from St. John Regional Catholic School will carry a flag in Waterville's Veterans Day parade on Tuesday, Nov. 11, that has journeyed from Maine to Afghanistan and back, serving as a traveling symbol of love, support, and a community's appreciation of true heroism.

The students created the handprint flag during Maine Catholic Schools Week in January and sent it to the Maine Army National Guard's 133rd Engineer Battalion stationed in Bagram, Afghanistan, as part of a large care package.

After receiving the package, the troops displayed the flag prominently outside of their chapel in Afghanistan. In June, members of the battalion posed for a photograph with the flag and signed it, offering words of thanks for the students' thoughtful gesture.

The St. John Regional Catholic School contingent of students and parents will carry the school's banner along the parade route, which begins at the American Legion on College Avenue and continues on Main Street and Front Street before concluding in the legion's parking lot. The Veterans' Day Parade begins at 10:30 a.m.

For more information, contact Dave Guthro, Communications Director for the Diocese of Portland, at [321-7810](tel:321-7810) or at dave.guthro@portlanddiocese.org.

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