

# Crowd pays tribute to Central Louisiana veterans at VA center in Pineville

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Veteran's Day Parade at the V.A. Medical Center: Veteran's Day Parade at the V. A. Medical Center. -- Tia Owens-Powers/ towens@thetowntalk.com

Written by

Jeff Matthews



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A crowd lines the parade route Friday at the Alexandria Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Pineville for its annual Veterans Day parade. / Tia Owens-Powers/ towens@thetowntalk.com



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Retired U.S. Army Col. Louis T. Dechert was the featured speaker Friday at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center's Veterans Day program. Tia Owens-Powers/ towens@thetowntalk.com

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PINEVILLE -- Their time in Korea is never far from Bernard Williams Sr. and Sherman Miller, especially so on Friday.

"I have a lot of flashbacks on this particular day," Miller said. "I'm just happy to be here. I'm happy I survived it."

"Sometimes my wife will have to wake me up in the morning," Williams said. "I'm still fighting a war from 50 years ago."

Williams, Miller and friends and fellow veterans from Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8852 were among scores of veterans, their families and well-wishers at Veterans Day festivities at the Alexandria Veterans Affairs Medical Center Friday.

Following a program in the morning, the annual parade was held at the center and then a lunch open to the public.

"This is a grand occasion today," said retired U.S. Army Col. Louis Dechert of Pineville. "Too many times in the U.S. we allow our attention to be diverted from what's really important. Veterans Day is all about the veterans. When we cease to honor our veterans, we will no longer be the United States of America."

"It's so great to see so many young people here," said Pineville Mayor Clarence Fields. "I applaud the parents and grandparents who took the time to bring them here. It's so important that we recognize the importance not just of this facility but particularly the veterans and those serving now. If you would, take the time sometime today to shake a veteran's hand and say 'thank you for the opportunities you have given us.'"

Vietnam veteran Richard Westley was supposed to be back home in Oklahoma Friday, but car trouble while visiting relatives in Avoyelles Parish left him stranded.

"I'm glad I stayed," he said. "It's good to see what they do to honor the veterans in different parts of the country. Louisiana has a lot of patriotism and pride. You can see that."

Westley said he's "honored to live in a country that knows freedom isn't free," a sentiment echoed by several Friday.

"Freedom, you have to pay for freedom," Thomas Ellis, another Korean War veteran and member of VFW 8852, used to tell his students during his time as a teacher and principal.

"We're all proud to be Americans," Williams said. "Especially today."

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Veteran's Day Program and Parade at the V.A. Medical Center