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Documentary filmmaker captures Bonita Springs Legion Post's U.S. Marine Corps birthday



(Photo: Thaddeus Mast/Staff)

Thaddeus Mast , Naples Daily News

2:07 p.m. EST November 11, 2016

Christmas lights shone through the slight cigarette-smoke haze as everyone stood, watching the man with the bagpipe. Traditional Scottish kilt led into the black shirt with white letters — MARINES.

“From the Halls of Montezuma, To the Shores of Tripoli...” the crowd sang out.

As the bagpipe drew quiet, scores of Amaretto and Southern Comfort shot glasses raised in unison — the crowd of veterans and family cheered to the U.S. Marine Corps’ 241st birthday

Thursday night.

American Legion Bonita Springs Post 303 was packed full with many of the 800 veteran members to celebrate the army branch’s birthday the night before Veterans Day.

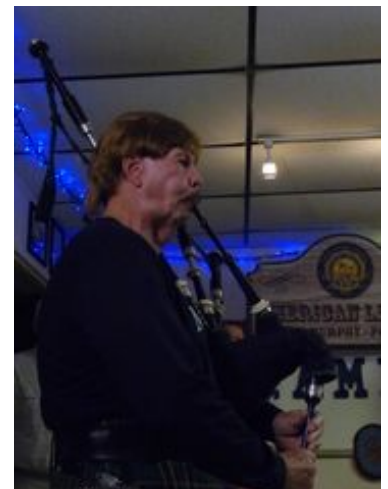
Keith Famie creates documentaries for PBS, traveling throughout the world in search of subjects and settings for Emmy-award-winning films. Supporting veterans and telling their stories has always been a subject close to Famie, he explained.

“Over the last 6, 7, 8 years, veterans have all been intricately involved in every project we’ve done, and it’s not done entirely on purpose — it just happens to be,” he said. “They are an integral part of our society, and I just happen to bring light to their eyes because they really matter.”

Famie is in Bonita Springs to film part of a new documentary, “Enlisted.”

“We’re going to talk to World War II guys, we’re going to talk to Vietnam guys and we’re going to talk to younger guys and girls about why they enlisted and what they got out of it,” he said. “It’s not just a tribute to the military, it’s delving into people’s lives and figuring out why they made this critical decision.”

Alisha Feezor served two tours overseas as an Army scout helicopter pilot,



Veteran Don Goller plays U.S. Marine Corps Hymn during the military branch’s 241st birthday at the American Legion Bonita Springs Post 303 Thursday night. (Photo: Thaddeus Mast/Staff)

sometimes flying as low as 50 feet to help keep ground forces informed.

"They'd throw rocks at us," she said.

Feezor always wanted to fly, but flight school was prohibitively expensive. She joined an ROTC program and took to the skies after graduation. And, while she no longer flies, the skills she's learned have helped back in Bonita Springs working as general manager at Pelican Isle Yacht Club.

"I would do it all again," she said. "It made me a well-rounded person."

"This is just as important to us as Veterans Day," Post Commander Adam Prentki III, a Marine veteran, said. A huge cake sporting the Marine Corps emblem rolled through the crowd to Prentki, who stood with a military sabre waiting to make the first slice.



A group of PBS filmmakers interview Alisha Feezor, former helicopter pilot in the U.S. Army turned general manager at the Pelican Isle Yacht Club.
(Photo: Thaddeus Mast/Staff)

The shots were empty, the cake was cut and people returned to their table or stood around the bar, but one 82-year-old Marine asked to sing the Star Spangled Banner. Again, everyone stood, hand over heart, and sang in unison.

Four people were busy with video cameras capturing the scene on film before it ended. The team roamed the crowd throughout the evening, talking with veterans and taking in the unique atmosphere — the Post is one of the few places in the state allowing indoor smoking, hearkening back to an older time.

Bonita Springs resident Bob Gillette is an executive producer of the film. He's worked with Famie on two other occasions, once to make a World War II veteran documentary and another about a Vietnam War veteran.

"(Famie) was looking for a great small town who takes care of their veterans, and I knew Bonita Springs was perfect" Gillette said.

Bonita Springs does a lot for the local veterans, Prentki agreed.

"With everything the city does — it has the Veteran's Advisory Council, and they're involved — (veterans) are getting taken care of, but they're also appreciated, and that's the big thing," he said. "When you go to the park (on Veterans Day), we put up 100 burial flags. When the city built that park, they decided to put in those holders so we could do that ceremony. That's something you don't always see."