

Coffee and Conversation (and Pancakes!)

By: Ruby Tozzi

On September 9, 2022 at the Perry Park Pavillion, two Perry High School organizations held a pancake breakfast event for our local veterans. The event was arranged by Students Against Destructive Decisions (S.A.D.D) and Perry Service Learning (PSL) volunteers. Nearly 50 guests were expected to attend the breakfast and were to be met with the scent of delicious home-made pancakes, sausage, fruit, bagels, coffee, and orange juice. Any left over food was treated as a trickle down gift for our local fire department and Perry Local Schools first responders.

Before any successful occasion comes planning and troubleshooting to make sure that all matters of business are going to be handled. At the first S.A.D.D. meeting of the year, three sign-up sheets were available. Volunteers had the opportunity to provide the skillets and extension cords, make welcoming and directional signs or help shop for the ingredients and supplies behind the scenes. On the day of the breakfast, each volunteer participated in distributing the breakfast and engaging in meaningful conversation with the veterans that were being celebrated by the event.

The event was entirely run by volunteers under the guidance of Mrs. Soeder. Volunteers had a plethora of reasons for choosing to participate; although, many of them agreed that the event sounded like a meaningful way to give back to our community. Volunteer Nikki Rosati expressed that she wanted to participate because she thinks, “It is important to honor all those who served, especially nearing the anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy.” Rosati hit the message of the pancake breakfast on the head in this, the overall goal was for the students of Perry High School to get involved in paying homage to a cause and a memory of the nation that is much bigger than themselves. Another volunteer, Samantha Lagania, saw the opportunity to connect with our local veterans and jumped right in, she says, “Everyone has a different story and if you don’t talk to them you’d never know it. This is the importance of approaching things with an open mind and an open heart.” Having the opportunity to learn about those we may see on a daily basis

on a one-on-one platform is a rare chance given and the young volunteers of the pancake breakfast surely utilized the discussion part of things.

Many volunteers chose to sit with the vets that they helped serve and held both casual and meaningful conversations about life, love, school, college, dreams, aspirations, government, health, connections, peace, war, and almost anything else imaginable. Two Buckeye Girls State attendees from Perry High School who have now begun their senior year, including myself and Holly Nadinic, participated. Our perspective on giving back to the community was just a bit different from the others as we saw it as an opportunity to give back to the amazing sponsors who sent us to an amazing program over the summer. Tom Anderson, the Perry High School American Legion Auxiliary contact and the man in charge of keeping me and my fellow BGS members informed and connected before and after the experience was in attendance as a guest. It was nice to connect with Mr. Anderson a little outside of the BGS and Auxiliary conversations, his attendance really gave an extra layer of meaning to the breakfast for me personally. His perspective of the event was that it was an opportunity to be thanked, give thanks, share, and hear the stories of others. He says, "To me, it's all about talking and sharing stories."

Mr. Anderson and some of his post members had a chance to reach out to other veterans and it had a terrific outcome. He says, "One of the members of our Post invited one of the veterans at breakfast to join us at the cemetery at noon to help the PSL class pick up and sort flags. Not only did he come, but he was among the last to leave. I was very pleasantly surprised!" Another Perry "Guest of Honor" that was present was Jennifer Hunter. Mrs. Hunter is one of those teachers that many students are extremely close with. She is the head of yearbook, journalism, and theater, she leads Pride, works in the theater guild and so much more. Even though she does all of this for her students, a lot of them do not give regular recognition to her service in our military. With no malice intentions of course, this part of her life is not one that is extremely relevant to her kiddos so highlighting it at the pancake breakfast was particularly meaningful to all that found her a familiar face at the event.

Overall, the Veterans Pancake Breakfast was a success for everyone who was involved in the event. Different roles allowed for different perspectives to alter the appearance and the effect of the

breakfast on all those wrapped in it, but, unanimously, it was an agreed success with an extensive positive impact all around.