

15th annual dinner by Operation SOS in Saugerties pays tribute to those who served

SAUGERTIES, N.Y. >> Upward of 50 local veterans came out to the Frank D. Greco Senior Citizens Center on Market Street Sunday for an annual dinner provided by Operation SOS.

The veterans enjoyed an Italian dinner of ziti and meatballs and garlic bread, along with sweets for dessert. During the event, care packages that included non-perishable food, cards, blankets and socks were prepared for service members serving abroad.

PHOTO GALLEY: Saugerties dinner honors veterans

“This is a dinner where we’re honoring veterans, and when I say Operation SOS, we mean Operation Support our Service People,” Gaetana Ciarlante, the Saugerties-based organization’s director and founder said.

Ciarlante said the group held its first dinner for veterans in 2003. She said she was inspired to found Operation SOS in part because she grew up in the Vietnam era and saw firsthand how difficult it was for returning veterans back then.

Among the veterans at Sunday’s dinner was Bill Hildago, a native of Costa Rica, who later became a U.S. citizen and served in the Marines from 1980-1983. Hildago was helping to cook.

Hildago said he always loves seeing soldiers of all ages and branches enjoying a good meal.

Craig Smith, who served in the Marines during the Korean War and beyond, from 1952 to 1956, said he enjoys the patriotism and camaraderie that comes out when veterans get together, talk and share stories.

He recalled the discipline he received in training at the Marine base at Parris Island, South Carolina.

“If they told us to run through a brick wall, we would,” Smith said.

He said he never worried about being injured in combat because he knew his fellow Marines would carry him out of danger.



BRIAN HUBERT -- DAILY FREEMAN Gaetana Ciarlante, founder and director of the group Operation SOS (Support Our Service people) greets Craig Smith, a U.S. Marine veteran, at the Frank D. Greco Senior Citizens Center in Saugerties, N.Y., on Sunday.

Rose Hogan, of Mount Marion, came out with her husband, Dennis Hogan, who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, after hearing about the dinner on the Saugerties Public Access Channel.

“It’s great. It’s about time the veterans get recognized,” Mrs. Hogan said. “They did a lot.”

Dave Ducas was serving as a disc jockey during the dinner, he said he missed having his number called for the Vietnam War draft by two people, but said he wanted to give back to veterans by working with Operation SOS.

“People can never ever do enough for our servicemen,” Ducas said.