

Local areas designated Purple Heart communities

Staff report

Several area cities, towns and counties are now Purple Heart communities following a ceremony last month at American Legion Post 57 in Lake City.

During an Our Community Cares Coalition event, the Military Order of Purple Heart Post 542, which introduced several Purple Heart recipients during the ceremony, hosted a tribute designating Lake City, Ft. White, Jennings, Jasper, Branford and Live Oak, as well as Hamilton County, Columbia County and Suwannee County as Purple Heart communities.

The ceremony took place Oct. 23 at the American Legion Post 57 with Commander Bill Huggins alongside municipal and county officials, Florida State Army Reserve Ambassador Jennifer Flynn, Victoria Coker, 2024 Minute Man Scholarship recipient, and Columbia County High School JROTC members.

The tribute allowed participants to hear the stories of Purple Heart recipients and followed ceremonies held the previous day at both Suwannee and Hamilton County high schools. The school ceremonies included the attendance of the Military Order of Purple Heart



COURTESY

Command Officer Walker, Mayor Witt, Commanding Sergeant Major Smith, Minuteman Scholarship and Army Reserve Cadet Victoria Coker, Command Sergeant Major Walden, and Sgt. Bolden participated in an Our Community Cares Coalition event designating several local cities, towns and counties as Purple Heart Communities.

Post 542, Huggins and members of the American Legion Riders including Tom Johnson, Chuck Caldwell, JD Morris and Allan (Sarge) Wood, Live Oak Mayor Frank Davis, Jasper City Manager Mark Meyers and members of the Jasper Police Department and Suwannee County Sheriff Office.

The event also highlighted the beginning of Red Ribbon

Week, a celebration of young people choosing drug-free lifestyles and included their learning about the week's activities and pledging a drug-free lifestyle.

"Tonight's event was the beginning of a tri-county coalition to help celebrate our collective interest and preserve our resources," said Jennifer Gisonni, a member of Our

Community Cares Coalition.

"The schedule of events for Red Ribbon Week give young people an opportunity to be safe, be entertained, and enjoy their choice to live a life where they are free to use the full capacity of a drug-free mind and we are excited for some very fun activities and come at no costs," said Bea Coker, a coalition member.