



COURTESY

Columbia High's JROTC held its annual 9/11 Memorial March on Thursday in remembrance of the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Columbia JROTC, Legion among 9/11 ceremonies

By TONY BRITT

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Columbia High School JROTC cadets solemnly and proudly carried the American flag to the school's flag pole on Thursday during the program's annual 9/11 Memorial March.

MORE INSIDE

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The march, held in memory of Sept. 11 terrorist attack victims, was one of several local Patriot Day programs throughout Columbia County as area residents held services to honor terrorist attack victims from 24 years ago.

Zala Perry, a 17-year-old senior, was one of the JROTC students that participated in the annual march honoring Sept. 11 victims.

"It feels great," she said of

9/11 continued on 6A

9/11

Continued From 1A

taking part in the ceremony. "I feel we're actually doing a change by how we represent them. It was a sad event, so I'm happy we were able to show how we care about them."

Phoenix Polansky, another 17-year-old senior, also spoke of the importance of participating in the ceremony.

"It was a little nerve-racking just because of the fact of it being so important in our country," he said. "The fact that we got it right makes you feel so much better in just knowing you did something good in honoring all the people that have died for our country, not just in 9/11, but all the wars throughout history."

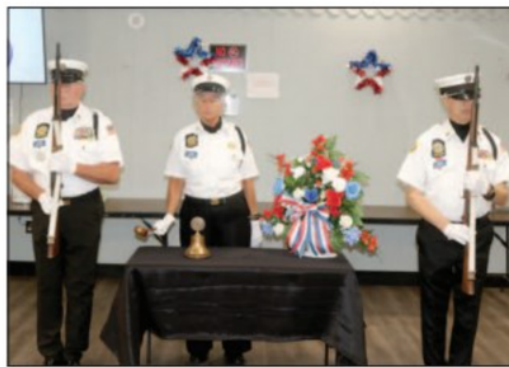
Trena Dettmer, First

Sgt. for the Columbia High School Army JROTC, said this year's memorial march was changed from previous events.

"We decided to change it to do a little smaller one this year," she said. "Last year we thought that was going to be our very last one, but this year we decided to do a smaller one because sometimes getting the whole school involved, the students don't understand the magnitude of 9/11, because these kids weren't born before 9/11..."

During this year's program, a group of more than a dozen JROTC cadets gathered near the school's front office and carried the flag through the door, following the first bell of the day when a majority of the school's students were in class.

"The only thing different this year was we didn't



TONY BRITT/Lake City Reporter

Members of the American Legion Post 57 Honor Guard take part in the Legion's ceremony Thursday evening honoring the victims on Patriot Day.

start at the auditorium," Dettmer said. "We still did Taps, did the respectful march and display of the American flag. It was the same, but smaller."

Neither Perry nor Polansky were alive when the terrorist attacks occurred, which was one of the things Lt. Col. Austin Akers, Columbia

High School JROTC Senior Army instructor, mentioned about students currently in the program.

Akers said he was pleased the program was able to provide a message to the students about the importance of honoring the victims of the terrorist attacks.

"The JROTC mission

is to help young people become better citizens and I think understanding a significant event like 9/11 helps those students and cadets do just that — understand what it is to be a citizen, understand what it is to have patriotism, understand what it is to remember those that were attacked and fell that day and since and the global war on terrorism," he said. "Regardless of your political beliefs, regardless of what decisions what this country did after 9/11, it's still important to remember those folks that lost their lives on 9/11."

The final local Patriot Day program took place Thursday evening at American Legion Post 57, where the Post's Honor Guard and chaplain held a brief ceremony for legionnaires and the general public.

William Bell, American Legion Post 57 chaplain, said the Post's inaugural Patriot's Day ceremony was a success.

"I was really glad. I was nervous but the Lord led me through it," he said.

During the program, Bell detailed that he was like so many other people and remembered exactly where he was and what he was doing when he learned of the terrorist attacks.

"It's something we should never forget," he said of the purpose of the ceremony. "I remember where I was just as a kid. It's what inspired me to join the military and I'm lucky to be able to serve still as a member of the American Legion."

Bell said there are plans to continue to hold a Patriot's Day Ceremony at the legion post in the future.