

## Lincoln School Honors Veterans



June 28, 2014

On Wednesday, May 21, Lincoln School, Caldwell, held its fourteenth annual U.S.A. Day celebration, welcoming veterans from throughout the Caldwells and beyond. Initially the result of a grant from the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University awarded to Lincoln School teachers Carol Macken and Christina Dunne, the school program is designed to encourage civic pride and teach students about our country and our flag.

The program, originally funded through the grant, was such a success that the celebration did not stop after that first year, but grew into a yearly celebration, culminating in a school-wide event at the school that includes veterans from as far away as Massachusetts and as nearby as Caldwell. Currently organized by fifth-grade teachers Christina Dunne and Abby Landau, all Lincoln School students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in the event, performing songs, reciting poems and recounting history in honor of our country and the visiting veterans.

In the first year, students invited 25 - 30 veterans from the Caldwell- West Caldwell area, and more than 20 veterans attended. However, the number of invitees and attendees has grown over the years, and this year, a record –breaking nearly 80 veterans and almost 500 students, staff and guests attended the celebration. Many of the veterans have been attending the event for all fourteen years.

“We invite the local veterans through American Legion Post 185, but we also ask the students to invite the special veterans in their lives,” said Dunne. “This year, about 80 veterans honored us by attending the celebration. Some came from as far away as Connecticut and Massachusetts.”

Students write letters and mail them to one or more veterans, inviting them to attend the school celebration. The children invite the veterans to be their honored guest at the school on U.S.A. Day. Each year, the veterans comment on how glad that they are to receive the invitation and look forward to attending the event. First-time attendees appreciate that our schools are teaching the children about these important historical events, take pride in our history, and thanking the men and women who serve our country. This year, excited for the annual event, American Legion Post 185 donated t-shirts for the fifth-grade student to wear during the celebration.

“This was so wonderful,” said a veteran attending this year for the first time. “My wife and I can’t believe how much the children are learning, and it was so nice to sit and talk with them. We will definitely come back next year.”

An active serviceman on leave who attended the event mentioned that he came to meet the child that wrote to him. He was flattered to receive the letter and was glad that the schools are teaching the children about our flag and country.

“The main purpose of the program is to instill within the students pride in their country, respect for the men and women that are fighting and have fought for freedom, an understanding of our country's symbols, and that freedom doesn't come easily,” said Lincoln School principal Adam Geher.

And, the program is working – for both the students and their parents. More than 200 parents and siblings also attended the event that is held outdoors so that families can attend. This was Lincoln School Principal Adam Geher’s third year hosting the much-anticipated event.

“We are always grateful when the weather cooperates,” said Geher. “This is one of the most anticipated events at our school, both by the students and staff, and the veterans and families. Lincoln School U.S.A. Day has given our school and most importantly our students a strong tie with the veterans who served and the active personnel who still serve our country.”