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Local

A grand old day for a grand old flag

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Veterans' groups in Georgetown and Murrells Inlet held ceremonies Thursday in honor of Flag Day.

In Georgetown, the Winyah Chapter of the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution held its 19th annual Retirement of Flag Service at Morgan Park.

Members of the Low Country Veterans Group raised the American and South Carolina flags during a ceremony at the old County Courthouse.

And Boy Scout Troop 396 held its Flag Retirement Ceremony at the Murrells Inlet American Legion post.

Georgetown

Col. Andy O'Meara, guest speaker for the 19th annual Georgetown Retirement of Flag Service, told attendees that the American flag is a symbol of the Republic and our God-given right to freedom.

"Today, we retire these colors that have served us well and honor those who have fought to preserve our freedoms," O'Meara said.

He added that in addition to Thursday being Flag Day it was also the birthday of the U.S. Army, for which he served in Vietnam and Saudi Arabia.

O'Meara was awarded the Silver Star for his service in Vietnam.

The ceremony was organized by the Winyah Chapter of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution, and was held at 10 a.m. at Morgan Park in Georgetown.

After the Georgetown High School Navy Junior ROTC Color Guard completed the parade of colors, Claudia Bessinger, chaplain, Winyah Chapter of the NSDAR, gave the invocation.

SK Clem Thoennes, faithful navigator of the Knights of Columbus Assembly 3272, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

He told of the Knights' involvement in getting the words "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance in the 1950s.

"Freedom under God allows all of the other freedoms to exist in our country," Thoennes said.

Jonathan Britt, a graduate of Georgetown High School, played the National Anthem.



Chris Sokoloski/Times
Theodore Russell, of the Low Country Veterans Group, raises the American and South Carolina flags above the old County Courthouse on Thursday morning. The Flag Day ceremony was attended by County Council Members Lillie Jean Johnson and Ron Charlton.



Clayton Stairs/Times
Members of the Knights of Columbus Assembly 3272 and the Daughters of the American Revolution held a Flag Retirement Ceremony in Georgetown. Above are SK Colin Peterson, SK Roy Elmendorf, SK Joe Gabriel, SK Clem Thoennes, Janet Rockey with

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O'Meara, who lives in Pawleys Island, was introduced by Janet Rocky, with the Winyah Chapter of the NSDAR.

DAR, SK Jim Bolan, SK Si Bula, City Councilman Paige Sawyer and SK Bob Pelletier.

He said that children learn the Pledge at a young age, but many recite the words without fully understanding its meaning.

It is later in life that people understand the importance of this American symbol, he said.

Next, Marilyn Altman, regent of the S.C. State DAR, led a ceremony to bury last year's ashes in the Betty Cook Garden at the park as Britt played "Taps."

Georgetown City Electric Department employees and Georgetown City Firefighters handled the retirement by fire of old flags.

Members of the Low Country Veterans Group stood at attention as the American and South Carolina flags were raised above the old County Courthouse during a Flag Day ceremony on Thursday morning.

Murrells Inlet

More than three dozen people joined Boy Scout Troop 396 at the Murrells Inlet American Legion post for the annual flag retirement ceremony.

Each Flag Day the Scouts ceremoniously retire old or damaged flags that they have collected over the past year, burning them according to the law.

"We learn by doing," said Eagle Scout Charles Mattocks of Murrells Inlet. "I learned from the older Scouts just as the younger Scouts learn from me."

The flags ranged in size from the 12-inch by 18-inch flags on a wooden stick to a giant flag that easily measured more than 6 feet across.

"No matter what the size, they are treated the same," said Mattocks.

"These flags represent people from all walks of life and every income level. They stand for freedom to live and to [work](#) where we choose. They stand for you and for me," he told the gathered spectators during the ceremony.

"We see this ceremony as a unifying event, bringing together the young, represented by the Scouts, and the older, represented by the legion," said Gary Mocarski, Troop 396 Scoutmaster.

Evans Kayser, the post commander, took the opportunity on the day Americans honor their flag to push for the flag protection amendment.

"Write your congressman about the importance of protecting our flag," he said, reading from an excerpt from the American Legion's national commander's message.

A U.S. House of Representatives resolution has been introduced this session to legislatively prohibit desecration of the American flag.

The proposed law follows on the heels of a failed 2006 attempt to add a law against flag desecration to the U.S. Constitution.

That failed by one vote in the Congress.

By Clayton Stairs

and Anita Crone

Times

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