

## Sailors Salute Game Honors America's Heroes



by Kate Holtrop

Sailors Stadium, September 17, Norton Shores-Mona Shores High School put on quite a show, not just by giving fans a great win over the Zeeland West Dux in the OK Green Conference game, but also by honoring America's heroes from the military, first responders, and frontline health workers with the 2021 Sailors Salute.

"Basically, what we wanted to do with [the event] was show our appreciation towards veterans, towards the militar[y], towards our police officers, firefighters, our first responders, because—it's not a cliché—without them, we wouldn't get to have a game like this," Mona Shores Coach Matt Koziak said, in an interview after the game.

A number of honors were given before, and during, the game, as the Sailors Salute event unfolded. Before the game, the Freedom Riders paraded their motorcycles through the Mona Shores High School parking lot amid static displays of military, police, and fire department vehicles. A huge American flag flew overhead, hung from the extended ladder of a fire truck. Not long after that, a POW/MIA remembrance took place, followed by the Community Mass Choir's beautiful rendition of "America the Beautiful" and "The Star-Spangled Banner". At the end of the Anthem, the Hooligans Flight Team flew over Sailor Stadium. Interactive military displays allowed fans to meet servicepeople and recruiters just inside the stadium's gates. Both teams thanked their heroes in a meet-and-greet with veterans, active-duty military, police, firemen, and



Corporal Veldman & The Honor Guard

first responders, on their way to their locker rooms just before the game began.

One very special honor of the night went out to Hometown Hero, Corporal Gerrit Veldman. At 100 years old, Corporal Veldman is one of the few surviving World War II veterans. Following the Honor Guard, Corporal Veldman waved to Sailors fans as a golf cart brought him down near the center of the home bleachers. Enlisting in 1942 at the age of 20, Gerrit fought for the Army in the European, African, and Middle Eastern Theaters. He was wounded, but continued the fight, receiving nine awards for his service. After his discharge in 1945, Corporal Veldman continued serving God and his country by joining the American Legion.

Between the first and second quarters, two Army recruits were sworn into service. Then, between the third and fourth quarters, cheerleaders from both teams participated in a 22-push-up challenge to bring awareness to veteran suicide, and to those who work to prevent it.

According to woodtv.com, SGT Dan Hibler of the Norton Shores Police Department, who helped organize the event, summed up the response to the night's festivities from his fellow servicepeople: "It's always heartwarming to feel the support of the community...We're all proud to serve in this area."

2021 marks the fifth Sailors Salute since the event began in 2016. Coach Koziak had always wanted to do some kind of military appreciation game. So, in 2014, he started. "We didn't call it the Sailors Salute at the time," he explained. "But we had veterans, and a food tent for veterans, and we took donations at the door. But who it really was, was our former athletic director, Ryan Portenga, who really took it to, you know, ten times over what [it was]. He came up with the Sailors Salute." Coach Koziak credited several others for planning as well. "Tim Lipan, Tom Conrad, Jennifer Bustard, [Joe] Kennucan, Dan Vandermyde—they are the driving force behind this...They're the ones that make this spectacular event."

Tim Lipan, chairman of the planning committee, told woodtv.com that the tribute has gotten bigger every year. "What you see today is the culmination of five years of growth," he said.

"[The Sailors Salute is] very personal to me,"

The company's West Olive facility offers dog training and boarding, while West Michigan K9 is also authorized to provide services to the U.S. Department of Defense and Homeland Security.

WM K9 founder Stephen Parent told MLive he hopes that the new facility will be a "one-stop shop for all things dogs." He says that if people need to bring their dog to a dog park, or get training for their dog, or even have a place where their dog will be able to go through physical therapy after surgery, this will be the place to go. The facility will have 20 new kennels especially for police dogs and military contracts.

Parent estimates WM K9 has grown 250% every year since 2016, the first year he started dog training full time. Originally, in 2013, Parent was training dogs out of his garage on the side of working corporate jobs, after serving in the Army. Demand for dog training continued to rise. 8 months after going full time with his business, Parent received his first military contract with the U.S. Department of Defense.

The new WM K9 facility will bring 50 new jobs to Fruitport Township, greatly expanding the company's current staff of 15 employees. Administration and dog training positions, as well as positions for groundskeepers and support staff, will be available.

In another statement to MLive, Parent said of running his business, "It's turned into seeing how many lives we can change through trained dogs." He also said that employing people has become the most rewarding part.

Another goal of WM K9 is to have a positive impact on communities by providing service dogs to veterans and trained dogs to police. The West Michigan K9 Foundation, which is the company's

Coach Koziak said. "My grandfather was in World War II. He stormed the beaches at Normandy. He was the 3rd Wave. And so, you know, you read about it and you see movies, but [you] don't realize that one of your family members did that. It's just incredible. And then my brother, Stephen's uncle, who coaches with us, served a tour in Iraq...I had uncles in the military. So I have a huge respect for people that are willing to sacrifice their lives for strangers...I think that's the ultimate sacrifice. And so, the least we can do is celebrate them and let them know how much they mean to us."

The coach's son, Stephen (senior defensive end, tight end, and half-back, #24), echoed his father's feelings, adding that the knowledge that his family members served their country so selflessly was a real motivator for him to play his best, especially when playing in support of servicepeople.

Coach Koziak wanted the game to really show thankfulness to servicemembers. "You know, we live in the greatest country on this planet, and our kids get to come out and compete in front of their hometown and they get to have people travel. And it's because of [servicepeople] that we get to do this. So we wanted to make it a big thing."

And the Sailors made the OK Green Conference game a big thing, too, scoring on all 8 possessions,



to win 47-12 over Zeeland West. Mona Shores Senior Quarterback Mark Konecny (#10) put the Sailors on the scoreboard with a touchdown in the first quarter. After that the Dux were only able to squeeze in two touchdowns, leaving a score of 27-12 at halftime. The Sailors got the second half going with long runs and more touchdowns, while barring Zeeland West from collecting any more points.

When asked what really spoke to him about the Sailors Salute, Konecny was excited about the whole event, describing the mutual support between team and servicepeople. "All the first responders, with the draped American flag from the firefighting truck, all the policemen and veterans that came out for us, to watch us compete and just put a show on for them. It was just a very, very good event."

## 80's Hip-Hop Inspired Exhibition by Detroit Artist, Tiff Massey, Opening at the Muskegon Museum of Art November 11

MUSKEGON, MI — Multimedia artist and metalsmith, Tiff Massey, brings *Jewelry Box*, a 1980's hip-hop fashion-inspired exhibition to the Muskegon Museum of Art from November 11, 2021 through February 20, 2022.

*Jewelry Box* is an immersive experience where large-scale jewelry pieces, gold, and mirrors will transform the MMA's Olthoff Gallery into a flashy display of dynamic exploration, self-identity, and fashion. Massey uses the concept of adornment as an examination of African diaspora and issues of race, class, and popular culture.

Massey was the first black woman to earn an MFA in metalsmithing from Cranbrook Academy of Art and maintains her studio practice in Detroit. Her art has been featured around the US and internationally, garnering multiple awards.

## West Michigan K9 Building New Dog Facility in Fruitport

by Kate Holtrop

Fruitport, Michigan—West Michigan K9, a rapidly growing dog training company from West Olive, Michigan, is in process of building a new dog training facility off Airline Highway east of Quarterline Road.

At a cost of \$2.5 million, the facility will be built of steel on 10 acres of land. The building will house up to 150 dogs, and provide training areas, as well as grooming rooms, and full veterinarian offices that will be open to the public.

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non-profit arm, donated a dual-purpose dog to the St. Clair Shores PD after one of the department's dogs was killed in the line of duty in 2018. The Foundation donated a dog to the Wyoming Police Department, as well, planning to donate 6 more by the end of 2021.

Parent hopes the new facility will open in the summer of 2022, being among the highest quality places for dog training, veterinarian care, and rehabilitation.



## A Grand Fialek Gathering for a Noble Cause

by Larry Pellet

Some of the stalwarts of the Cloverville Fialek's gathering last summer for their nephew Bob Fialek, who is battling cancer. It was a great turnout of friends and family at the Cloverville Eagles.

Starting at the left, seated, are Donna (Fialek) Motykiewicz, then Betty (Fields) Fialek, and Beverly (Raffie) Fialek.

Standing are Norbert Motykiewicz, Willard Fialek, and Richard Fialek.