

LOCAL NEWS

**Downtown turns red, white and blue**

*Veterans Day parade seen as biggest and best*

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The 2009 Veterans Day parade may have been the biggest and best attended in years.

With nearly 100 entries and some of the best weather it has had in years, the parade, hosted by the Edwardsville American Legion and VFW, was expected to draw a large crowd.

But VFW Commander and Parade Chairman John Koch said he could not believe his eyes on Wednesday night.

"This may have been the biggest crowd ever," Koch said. "We had good weather about four or five years ago and we had a good crowd, but I think tonight was even bigger."

American Legion Commander Ed Collins agreed.

"There were a lot of people out there," Collins said.

Collins said the parade traditionally is in the evening and may conflict with people's schedules.

"I know people have things to do like homework and they do not have much time in the evenings," Collins said. "But tonight, there were a lot of young people out there waving flags and getting into the patriotism of the parade."

Collins said the organizations appreciated the community's support – those who participated in the parade and those who came out to watch the parade.

"The city of Edwardsville has been good to us," Collins said. "We could not survive without them."

Spectator Kenneth Leroy of Highland, who has been coming to the parade to watch it or participate in it for more than 30 years, said he too was impressed with the crowd this year.

"We come out about every year," Leroy said. "This year, there is a nice crowd."

Leroy, a veteran of the Korean War, said Edwardsville is one of the few places left that has a parade to honor Veterans Day.

"Our post, Highland, will be in the parade showing their colors," Leroy said.

The parade included veterans from all across the area and VFW and American Legion posts and Auxiliaries not just from Edwardsville and Glen Carbon, but from all around the region such as Highland, Worden and many more.

In addition, the parade drew spectators from other communities. Like Leroy from Highland, Amanda Van Loo of Mount Olive, originally from Edwardsville, drove from a surrounding community to see the parade.

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A World War II-era dressed soldier steps out of line to shake the hand of Vietnam Army veteran Ed Oates of Granite City during the Veterans Day parade Wednesday evening. Oates attended the parade with his daughter and grandchildren of Edwardsville. Photo by Marci Winters-McLaughlin.

Van Loo said she has been coming to the parade for years.

"It is a great parade," Van Loo said.

Along with many veterans, the parade also included members of SIUE's ROTC and the local National Guard, as well as numerous bands playing patriotic music, dignitaries, school groups, organizations and hundreds of Boy and Girl Scouts.

And participants were very patriotic too – from dress to show.

Veterans and members of the military were fully dressed in uniform.

One veteran as he passed by in a convertible yelled to the crowd, "Thanks everyone for supporting the veterans."

And many participants in the parade were waving American flags or signs with messages like "Thank you veterans" or "Veterans are awesome."

After the parade, there was an open house at the American Legion. A large crowd of parade participants and attendees filled the Legion Hall. The guests listened to a performance by Shriner's Brass Band and enjoyed refreshments by the Legion Auxiliary.

Collins said every year the organizations invite the public to the open house after the parade to show the public their appreciation for their support.

Koch said the Shriner's Brass Band have been performing at the event for countless years.

"They always put us on their schedule," Koch said.

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