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## Salute to veterans: Event honors, supports past and present members of military

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by Rachel Gray

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Marietta resident and former Air Force airman Bob Ross was one of the Korean War veterans honored Saturday during the 11th Annual Veteran's Day Celebration at the Marietta Conference Center. The event was presented by the Cobb County Republican Women's conference. Committee Chair Donna Rowe says the event was established to support those being deployed to Afghanistan. "We didn't want our country to turn on them like they did after Vietnam," said Rowe, who was an Army triage and trauma nurse in the Vietnam War. Staff/Todd Hull

MARIETTA — An annual event to celebrate the role local veterans have played throughout the nation's history was a sold-out affair Saturday morning with many well-known community leaders filling the seats.

The Cobb County Republican Women's Conference presented its 11th Annual Veteran's Day Celebration at the Marietta Conference Center off Powder Springs Street with more than 300 people circled around tables in the banquet room.

Sheila Brower, who was president of the Cobb County Republican Women's Conference in 2011, said she had to remind several groups before the event to make a reservation, and organizers had to turn some people away once the room was fully booked.

Seats were sold to veterans for \$20, but most tables were sponsored for \$500 to \$1,000, largely by local politicians such as Cobb County commissioners, but

also by candidates vying for offices at the state and national levels.

One such table was purchased by U.S. Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-Marietta), who is running for U.S. Senate to replace retiring Sen. Saxby Chambliss.

Gingrey said he has been coming to the event for the past six to eight years, and made a point of stopping by while out on the campaign trail for the next week.

"It is of highest priority to honor the wonderful men and women that have had our back since the county has existed," Gingrey said.

Gingrey said no group honors veterans better than the Cobb County Republican Women's Conference.

"You know it isn't just going through the motions, it is emotions," Gingrey said.

The festivities did have a solemn start when hats from uniforms of Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force officers were placed at a table in the center of the room in front of an empty chair while Amazing Grace was played on the bagpipes by Scott McAliley.

Scott McAliley's wife, Shaun, cried while he played the song.

Shaun McAliley said she is grateful for this great country and especially for her many great-uncles who served in the Navy and Army during World War II.

"We are patriots at heart," said Shaun McAliley, who grew up in Cobb County and now lives in Cherokee.

### Giving shelter and support

Donna Rowe, the Veteran's Day committee chair, said she started planning this year's two-hour long program in March.

Eleven years ago, the annual celebration was started to show love to service men and women being deployed to Afghanistan, Rowe said.

"We didn't want our country to turn on them like they did after Vietnam," said Rowe, who was an Army triage and trauma nurse in the Vietnam War.

Every year, part of the money raised from the celebration goes to a charity, with this year's recipient being the Marietta-based Save Homeless Veterans, Inc.

Save Homeless Veterans, Inc., which was started only 11 months ago, helps to provide veterans with housing and jobs, as well as medical and psychiatric care.

Martin Pool, the executive director of the nonprofit Save Homeless Veterans, said there are 2,600 homeless veterans in the metro Atlanta area.

Although not a veteran, Pool said he knows what it is like to lose everything because he was homeless on the streets of Atlanta.

"I know what it feels like to be desperate and in despair," Pool said.

Pool said the rehabilitation programs offered by Save Homeless Veterans are not just for the homeless but also for men and women recently returning from service overseas.

Pool said 22 veterans kill themselves every day nationwide. He added young men and women coming back from tours of duty and are turning to drugs and alcohol to combat PTSD, paranoia and traumatic brain injuries.

"I think every American should be concerned about the state of our veterans in this country," Pool said.

Pool said Save Homeless Veterans accepts monetary donations, offers to be a mentor, and even rides to veterans for medical appointments.

"There are a lot of forms of service to these veterans," Pool said.

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