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Vet fest offers fun, food, music, information and more to veterans and families at park



This artist's rendering of the main building of Camp Valor was on display at the Vet Fest.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 25, 2018 at 8:48 p.m.

OTTER SPRINGS -- Otter Springs Park and Campground was the site for a lot of fun, food, music and information for veterans and their families during the Vet Fest hosted by ForVets Inc., and Meridian Supportive Services for Veteran Families on Saturday (Aug. 25).

Robert Wells, a Meridian employee and an active member of the Tri-County Area for civic functions, was among the keynote speakers.

Wells is among the founders of the Levy County Prevention Coalition. He is active with the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition and is among the initiators of the Gilchrist (County) Anti-Drug Coalition. Wells and other speakers told listeners about services available to help veterans and families, and they welcome all veterans to the vent -- thanking all veterans for their service to the United States of America.

The festival at Otter Springs Park and Campground, 6470 S.W. 80th Ave., near Trenton in Gilchrist County was for veterans and families.

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Seen here are (from left) Connie Brosam, Camilla Rolfe and Jacob Brosam. They are the family members from Abundance of Grace Kettle Corn who were serving veterans and families on Saturday at Vet Fest.

Among the food providers were Kim's Catering of Gainesville and Abundance of Grace Kettle Corn.

Kim's Catering had hotdogs, hamburgers and much more.

Abundance of Grace Kettle Corn had kettle corn, other types of popped corn, water and much more.

Among the fun games were a beanbag toss and another game where children could throw string with weights on either end to catch on thin bars that served as targets.

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Dwight Smith (seated) and Don Thomas perform on stage at the event.

Debbie Destin, owner of Destin's Dance and Fitness Academy of Bell, brought a dance troupe to perform at the event. Dwight Smith and Don Thomas performed on guitar and sang.

Several organizations sent representatives to share information with interested visitors. There were also free items given away -- like ink pens, pens that had a built-in flashlight, cloth bags, glow-in-the-dark cups and lots of literature.



The bloodmobile from LifeSouth Community Blood Services was available for people to donate blood if they wanted to. LifeSouth provides 100 percent of the blood to

hospitals in Williston, Gainesville and other communities.

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Among the volunteers in The Friends of ForVets group are (from left) Mary Ann Mulvey, Wendy Motta and Karen Richardson.

One of the groups at the event was the Friends of ForVets Inc. The ForVets Inc. organization is at the forefront of the Camp Valor project at Otter Springs Park and Campground.

Camp Valor will be transitional living and learning for severely wounded American veterans returning to civilian life. The four fundamentals at Camp Valor will be Education, Rehabilitation, Enterprise and Recreation.

The Friends of ForVets are volunteers. They meet the last Monday of each month at 6 p.m. in the Gilchrist County Public Library at Trenton, 120 Academy St. (just off of U.S. Highway 129, a little bit north of Trenton High School).

Anyone who wants to help is invited to join the group.

Among the many organizations providing information to visitors were AmVets Post 422 of Fanning Springs; One More Child (the Florida Baptist Children's Home for orphans); Sheila Smith, financial advisor with Edward Jones of Newberry; Trident University (an online university based in California); Tri-County Nursing Home of Gilchrist County; Gilchrist County AARP Chapter 2133; The Suwannee River Area Health Education Center; The Florida Attorney General's Seniors vs Crime; and Another Way shelter for abused women and children.

Every organization was able to provide visitors with as much information as they wanted.

For instance, the AARP Chapter of Gilchrist County meets the third Tuesday of every month at the ForVets Lodge at Otter Springs Park, with a sign-in at 10 a.m.

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The AARP has a lunch each meeting and people who are 50 or older are invited to join for \$10 per year.

At the meeting on Sept. 18, there is going to be a plethora of information about the nine to 13 amendments that are to be on the ballot on Nov. 6. This is truly going to be a very informational meeting.

From the Seniors vs Crime organization, it was Kaaren Phelan, the case manager from the Levy County Sheriff's Office, and Judy Harden, deputy director of Region 4 who provided people with information.

Region 4 of the Seniors vs Crime includes the counties of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Citrus, Gilchrist, Lake, Levy, Marion, Sumter, Suwannee and Union counties.

"The Seniors vs. Crime Project is a Florida, non-profit organization that operates as a Special Project of the Florida Attorney General's Office, the website for the group notes. "In 1989 Attorney General Bob Butterworth was directed by the Florida Legislature to chair the Crimes and the Elderly Task Force."

For more information about this resource, please visit

<http://www.svcregion4.org/whatwedo>.

AmVets Post 88 in Bronson on Saturday (Aug. 25) also conducted a yard sale for that post to donate money to the Camp Valor endeavor.

As for the 2018 Vet Fest, there were about 200 visitors from start to finish. It was another successful year for the event in the park.