

SUNDERLAND

'It's never too early to serve'

Students hear call to action in early Veterans Day ceremony



STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS LARABEE

Hale-Clapp Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3295 members Ray Billiel and Matthew Jakutowicz demonstrate folding the American flag on Wednesday.



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Sunderland School Committee member and U.S. Army 1st Lt. Peter Gagarin speaks to Sunderland Elementary School students in a ceremony honoring Veterans Day.

By CHRIS LARABEE
Staff Writer

SUNDERLAND — For the 13th consecutive year, Sunderland Elementary School students observed the Veterans Day holiday by learning about ways they can serve their community.

Gathered around the edges of the veterans memorial on Wednesday, the students listened to Sunderland School Committee member and U.S.

Army 1st Lt. Peter Gagarin and members of the Hale-Clapp Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3295 explain the reasoning behind lowering the American flag to half-staff and folding the flag. The University of Massachusetts Color Guard was also in attendance.

Gagarin encouraged students to serve the community in their own ways and to look out for one another.

"It is never too early to

serve, to help others" Gagarin said in his speech. "You might invite someone to sit next to you on the school bus or ask them to play with you at recess."

He continued by saying students can find fulfillment by creating a "welcoming environment" and doing kind deeds for each other.

"You do this by being a good friend, by offering support to someone who may be having a tough time," Gagarin

said. "By making someone else's life even just a little bit better, you fill their bucket with kindness, and in turn you will end up filling your own."

Frontier Regional School band members Eric Brown and Leo Franceschi played taps as the flag was lowered to half-staff. The ceremony was closed out with all of the students in attendance singing "This Land is Your Land."

Last year's ceremony was held virtually with clips of the

previous events interspersed.

Sunderland Elementary School Principal Ben Barshefsky said the ceremony gives students a chance to reflect on the sacrifices made by military members while also thinking about how they can be model citizens.

"It's all about providing students with an opportunity to think about and reflect on different ways they can serve their communities," Barshefsky said. "Those families

make significant sacrifices and they're apart from one another for many months at a time. ... It helps to understand what that selfless service looks like."

Barshefsky said the call to action the school put out to students ties right into a "longstanding tradition" called "Sunderland in Action Day," which is a day where students perform community

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STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS LARABEE

Sunderland Elementary School students gather at the town's veterans memorial on Wednesday morning to observe the holiday and learn about how they can serve their community.