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WKU ROTC cadet lounge named after Eric D. Yates

By ANDREW HARP THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE
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Kathy Yates, right, speaks after the unveiling of the refurbished Western Kentucky University ROTC cadet lounge on Feb. 1. The lounge is named after her son, 1st Lt. Eric D. Yates.

Photos provided by Clinton Lewis/Submitted

The newly refurbished Western Kentucky University ROTC cadet lounge now also bestows the name of a former student and Hardin County native.

1st Lt. Eric D. Yates, a 2008 WKU graduate and 2003 graduate of John Hardin High School from Rineyville, was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2010 after an improvised explosive device detonated near his patrol.

Yates served in the Army's 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell. The new lounge opened this month with Yates' family in attendance.

Col. Morgan Greene, professor of military science, said the original cadet lounge, located in E.A. Diddle Arena, hadn't been updated in a few years. He arrived at the school in 2019 and the lounge sits across from his office.

Greene said a few of the cadets approached him about possibly updating and refurbishing the lounge and naming it in Yates's honor.

"What we tried to do was reflect and make the lounge be a comfortable space for our cadets to socialize and gather while being able to honor the history," he said.

However, after the COVID-19 pandemic began, the project was put on hold.

Greene said he then shopped around the idea to active alumni members and worked with other school departments to see what they could do in terms of the name of the lounge. He said a student on internship then designed a \$30,000 plan for the lounge.

Money from the school and the First Lt. Eric Yates Scholarship contributed to the project.

“It was a long road with lots of different cadets, lots of different stakeholders involved in the process,” Greene said.

Kathy Yates, Eric’s mother, said Eric loved his time in the WKU ROTC, and made lifelong friends there.

“He loved his years at Western for that is the best place to honor him,” she said.

A third of the lounge is now a small indoor physical fitness facility with free weights, a squat rack and pull-up bar. The rest of the lounge is study and gather space with new furniture, flooring and paint. New computers are on the way to be utilized.

Also featured was a wooden American flag crafted from bourbon barrels by Chris Cruise, a military veteran and co-owner of Cruise Customs in Shepherdsville. He also created a smaller American flag for Kathy and her family as well.

“It looks like a place you’d be proud to show off and it looks like a place where you would be more comfortable working and socializing,” Greene said.

Greene said he feels cadets at WKU resonate with the story of Eric, which is why they wanted the lounge to be named after him.

“He was killed two years after he graduated. That is something that I think is easily relatable for our cadets,” Greene said.

Along with this, Kathy and David Yates are also active in the program, sponsoring two scholarships to cadets every year.

“It was just a lot of outpouring of love and support,” Kathy said.

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