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WKU Student Veterans Alliance celebrates success

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Dec 1, 2017

When Don Butler remembers serving in the U.S Marine Corps, he remembers how much his brothers in arms taught him about teamwork, duty, honor and courage.

Butler, a Vietnam veteran and retired educator, sought to pass on those values to members of Western Kentucky University's Student Veterans Alliance during its awards banquet Friday. Butler encouraged graduating students to continue volunteering and serving the veterans community.

"We need you. We need new ideas, new energy," he said, speaking at American Legion Post 23. "It doesn't matter where you've served ... we need you."

Members of the Student Veterans Alliance help veterans transition from military into academic life by offering peer-tutoring, counseling and other services. Rick Wright, the group's faculty adviser, said the group has helped advocate for a veterans resource center and is continuing to advocate for a special orientation for veterans and advanced registration. The group has existed on campus since 2010.

Joe Hunter, an SVA member preparing to graduate with an engineering degree, has been both president and vice president of the group and presented leadership awards during the banquet.

Hunter, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for about 9 years, said his service let him experience Germany, the Czech Republic, Sudan, El Salvador and Brazil.

“I feel like I have a much bigger worldview now,” he said, adding he understands how U.S. foreign policy can affect other countries.

It also gave him values that he credits for his success. He’s graduating magna cum laude, which requires a GPA between 3.60 and 3.79 at WKU.

“I think a lot of that’s just due to the military discipline,” he said. “You get a lot of focus.”

While serving as a Marine security guard, Hunter helped protect then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former President Barack Obama. He got to meet both of them and remembers Obama’s comment about the Kentucky Wildcats.



“I got to meet him, shook his hand,” he said. “He made fun of the Wildcats. I wish I knew about sports back then. I would have tried to quip back.”

SVA President Alex Reynolds presented the Friend of SVA Award to the WKU Parents Advisory Council. Reynolds also received a Leadership Award along with SVA vice president Dylan Smith, treasurer Ilana Therrien and secretary Kacie Henderson. Two \$250 SVA Scholarships were presented to Derrick Hall and William Williford. Wright presented the SVA Advisor’s Award to Latarrah Burton.

During his talk, Butler shared his own experiences serving overseas and later studying at Morehead State University. Butler encouraged students to lead by example, clearly communicate and celebrate successes together, among other pieces of advice.

“There are no free lunches,” he said. “You must be willing to get after it.”

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