

BRANFORD

5/25/18

7 vets honored in Quilts of Valor ceremony

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — Vietnam veteran Dave Ricci regarded with awe the quilt that had just been wrapped around his shoulders.

"I'm trying to figure out how you put it together," the former Marine and Orange resident told Carol Brunt last week at Stony Creek's Willoughby Wallace Library at the most recent ceremony for the Quilts of Valor initiative, the mission of which is "to cover service members and veterans touched by war," as its website reads.

"Come here on Tuesdays and you'll find out," someone called out to gales of laughter, referring to the weekly meeting of the Willoughby Wallace Quilters.

"Or you can just take it apart

yourself," someone else said.

From there, the seven veterans being honored took the lively banter to another level.

West Haven's Mark Levine, a Vietnam veteran who served in the Army, smiled broadly while being wrapped in Denise Daly's "fantastically intricate, drop-dead gorgeous" quilt, as Quilts of Valor Connecticut coordinator and emcee Jane Dougherty described it, then thanked fellow honoree and former U.S. Postal Service colleague Paul White.

"I worked 40 ½ years in the post office, and during that time Paul and I very happily led each other astray," Levine told the crowd.

White, who served in the Navy in Korea, pledged to share Claire

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Clockwise from left are Quilts of Valor recipients Al Paulsen, Paul White, Mark Levine, Dave Ricci, Bill Savastano, Frank Corso and Gene Palmieri.



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Veterans were honored at a Quilts of Valor ceremony at the Willoughby Wallace Library in Branford. From left are Bill Savastano, Dave Ricci, Mark Levine, Paul White and Al Paulsen.

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Larkins' giving quilt with his four local grandchildren and the other eight, "who are someplace else."
 "Flat-out amazing," the Northford resident said. "I never expected something like this."

Nor did Branford's Al Paulsen, who did a so-called "kitty cruise," an enlistment in the Navy starting before his 18th birthday and ending before his 21st, towing ammunition barges on a tug boat in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and later serving on a destroyer that went around the world.

"I had no idea," Paulsen, jauntily clad in suspenders and a straw hat, told the audience as Jeanne Prota wrapped him in a friendship star

quilt. "I only came to see what was going on."

The proceedings took a dramatic turn when Chuck Larkins, a veteran of the Air Force who served in Vietnam, unveiled a quilt he had made for Bill Savastano, surprising the Army veteran and fellow Branford VFW Post 12106 member.

"To have a friend and fellow veteran do this for me means a lot," Savastano said of Larkins, who took up quilting on a dare from his wife last year and since then has crafted no less than 12.

There was another heartwarming moment when Branford's Gene Palmieri, after being wrapped in Donna Robinson's giving quilt, learned his mother-in-law, Eleanor, had nominated him to be honored.

"Wow," he said. "That's

just beautiful."

Still, nothing topped Frank Corso's reply when Dougherty asked the World War II Iwo Jima veteran where he was going to be on Sunday, May 20.

"I don't know where I'm going to be tomorrow, dear," the 96-year-old said to general hilarity, before agreeing to attend the Iwo Jima Survivors Victory Ride in Newington.

"Oh goody," Dougherty said, clapping her hands. "I don't usually get a date out of these."

To honor a veteran, visit govf.org, find the "take action" tab, and click "request a quilt," or email jane.dougherty@govf.org.

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