

19TH CENTURY RE-ENACTORS PROVIDE 21ST CENTURY OPPORTUNITIES

By Michael Grady

THE SPEAKERS AT THE YAVAPAI COLLEGE VETERAN'S FAIR
SEEMED TO STEP FROM ANOTHER AGE.



One wore a derby, the other a stovepipe hat. Both wore 19th Century cravats and stood solemnly in wool dusters and patterned waistcoats during their introduction. Then Neil Thomas, president of the Prescott Regulators and Their Shady Ladies, stepped forward in front of the tabletop flags and soldiers and Veterans Service organizations.

He spoke, appropriately, about history. "We have to remember our history," Thomas told them. "And our veterans are a very important part of our history."

You probably know The Prescott Regulators and Their Shady Ladies for shooting up downtown. For 14 years, the Regulators have been the driving force behind the "Shootout on Whiskey Row," the pistol-packin' re-enactment of Prescott's wildest Wild West days.

What you may not know is that the Regulators go deeper than gunplay and ten-gallon hats. They are a 14 year-old community non-profit, dedicated to historical preservation. Unlike their forebears, the Regulators do no harm when they hold a shootout. In fact, when the smoke clears, they leave the world a little better than they found it.

“Three years ago, the Prescott Regulators came to us and established a scholarship,” Yavapai College Foundation Executive Director Paul Kirchgraber said. “It’s called the Veterans Military and Family Scholarship.”

Yes, the Regulators use money raised from those shootouts to help veterans, their spouses and even their children attend college. “All you have to do is have been in military service,” Thomas explains. “You don’t have to have been in combat, or served overseas.” The idea, he says, is to fill an opportunity gap within the veteran community.

“You already have programs to cover combat veterans, and wounded warriors – and well you should. But anyone who has been in military service will tell you it’s a sacrifice. You’re gone. You could be over in Korea, freezing your tush off; or up in Alaska, where you’re lucky to get the sun twice a year. And your family is making a sacrifice, too. That’s why the scholarship includes spouses and family members. They manage the same loneliness and anxiety. They should have the same opportunity.”

The scholarship has already helped three recipients bridge the gap between wanting a shot at college and taking a seat in class. “It’s a remarkable gift when you think about it,” Kirchgraber said. “You’re giving a person the chance to fulfill their potential and improve their lives.”

“The Regulators have veterans from every branch of the service,” Thomas explains, “the Marine Corps, the Navy, three or four from the Army.” In the past, they bounced around, contributing to different charitable organizations every year. But helping military families struck a chord. “We have everything from Vietnam vets to Desert Storm vets. We know the importance of military service, and we know what service is like. Helping someone like that get through college, debt-free ... it’s rewarding.”