

BUSINESS/DISTRICT

McKeesport veterans honored at Palms

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Some of McKeesport's veterans received a "thank you" during a Tuesday program at The Palms at O'Neil residence.

On the city's behalf, as well as his own, Mayor Michael Cherepko offered such thanks as well as certificates and commemorative pins for 21 of those veterans.

"My father was a Vietnam veteran, 101st Airborne, who received two Purple Hearts," Cherepko said.

He said it was why, during 12 years as a teacher in McKeesport Area School District, he taught his students respect for veterans.

Among those feted at The Palms was Al Forgash, a Marine who also won two Purple Hearts, one with a gold star, while fighting in the Pacific during World War II.

"It was great," Forgash said about the event, which included a lecture on veterans benefits.

"We probably have five or six events throughout the year," Palms administrator Craig Anlauf said. "Two are specifically for veterans."

Cherepko made presentations to 16 of those veterans including Forgash.

"He was in three major battles," said Forgash's son-in-law Robert Belkowski of North Huntingdon Township.

Back home in Glassport during the war years, Forgash's future wife Dorothy Karap was collecting articles about local military overseas for a scrap-



Cindy Shegan Keeley | Daily News

Brendan Kelley of Gateway Hospice welcomes veterans and guests to the Veterans Appreciation and Information Day held at The Palms at O'Neil in McKeesport Tuesday.

book.

"Her mother made this before they were married," Belkowski said.

It was a collection that included, oddly enough, the story of Robert Belkowski's cousins, two brothers from Glassport who were Army Air Corps pilots in World War II.

"Arthur (Franklin) later worked with NASA on the Apollo space missions," Robert Belkowski said. "Richard (C. Franklin) became a researcher at U.S. Steel in Monroeville."

After World War II, Forgash was discharged. As a corporal with an E-5 pay grade, he had been earning \$66 a month.

"That was a lot of money," Alexis Belkowski recalled. Still, by the time of the Vietnam conflict, her husband was making \$580 a month as an Army sergeant with the same E-5 pay grade.

Al and Dorothy Forgash

lived in West Mifflin for 60 years after World War II. The Belkowskis take care of her mother.

Pensions and compensation for veterans was Tuesday's topic for Colleen Bratkovich, an attorney with the Versailles law firm of Zacharia & Brown, which specializes in issues facing the elderly.

"It is a straight cash pension," Bratkovich said. "You get money deposited in your account every month."

She stressed a 2006 Veterans Administration survey that found only a quarter of eligible veterans and 17 percent of eligible widows were getting such pensions.

Further details may be found at the law firm's PittsburghElderLaw.com website.

Other veterans on hand for Tuesday's event included Frank Bunda, Anthony Gonnella, Dominic Margliotti, Donald Morris,

Ronald Saunders, James Volpe, Patrick White and James Wiggins, who served in the Army; Navy veterans Harry Beresford, Joseph Graziano, Omar Holland and Lydia Knaus; Marine veteran Norman Barr; and Air Force/Army Air Corps veterans Thomas Douglass and Eugene Svrbely.

Also honored but unable to attend were Bert Fejes (Army), George Mikolay (Marines), Theodore Raget (Navy) and John Shields (Marines).

The Very Rev. Stephen Chervenak from St. Angela Merici Church in White Oak provided the invocation while the Rev. Wayne Hobbes, a chaplain from Gateway Hospice, provided the benediction.

Other event sponsors included Gateway Hospice, Sandin Home Health Services, Point Pleasant Retirement Community and Senior Bridge.