

# Passing the flag to future generations at core of VFW program

By SUE REID

“Even though it’s just a couple of seconds, it’s a memory that will last forever.”

That’s how Chagrin Falls Intermediate School sixth-grader Kenny Kang described his experience as a Chagrin Falls VFW Student Color Guard Leader. It is one that he encourages other students to take part in.

Kenny, 11, of South Russell, was the first among the handful of students in the district who raised the flag at Harris Field during this season’s Chagrin Falls High School football games as part of a program of the Chagrin Falls VFW Post 12067.

Since its dedication in 2011, members and guests of the post raised the flag on their pole at every home game. The student color guard leadership opportunity began this fall.

The program, which is still in the planning stages with the school district, is titled “Flags and Friday Nights.”

“I was very honored to get picked,” Kenny, of Korean descent who moved to this country at the age of 5, continued. His friends thought it was cool, too, and his school announced his name during the morning announcements.

Nervous at first, he said when he lifted the flag at the homecoming game he knew it meant representing America.

It also symbolized something deeper. “It felt like I’m not invisible, and people see me,” Kenny said.

Chagrin Falls High School freshman Aleena Aniev, of South Russell, said this was the first time she has ever done such a thing — raise a flag and be in the spotlight.

“It felt really good,” Aleena, 14, said. She raised the flag during the last home game of the season.

Being a Student Color Guard Leader was a great opportunity to show her respect for the veterans, including her father, Aleena said.

“It’s this feeling you get when raising it,” she added. “When the band saluted me, I felt important.”



**South Russell resident Kenny Kang, a sixth-grader at Chagrin Falls Intermediate School and Chagrin Falls VFW Student Color Guard Leader, raises the American flag on Harris Field during this season’s homecoming game. He was among a handful of students to share in the honor as part of the VFW-sponsored program “Flags and Friday Nights.” Pictured with Kenny are VFW member Brian Morrison, Robbie Bourne (saluting) and Dane Lyle.**

Sophomore Ethan Nelson said he, too, felt important, and his mother captured a photo of his experience.

“I was nervous at first I would mess it up but I didn’t,” Ethan, 16, of Chagrin Falls,

said. “I would do it again just to do it. It was a great experience.”

The idea is to expose kids in the district to the opportunity, VFW Post Commander Todd Lyle said.

“We are looking for the silent leaders,” he said. “We want to give them a voice.”

“There are so many really good kids out there,” Mr. Lyle added.

The VFW-driven program is open to any student who resides in the district, including those in private school or home-schooled.

Dane Lyle, 11, a CFIS sixth-grader, said his father got him involved in the flag-raising process and he grew to learn how important it is.

“I’ve done this since I was about 5,” Dane said. “And over time, my dad told me what it actually means to do it, and I think it’s pretty cool.”

It’s always an honor to raise the flag, Dane added.

While he tries to get the flag up as fast as he can and not mess anything up, he said he thinks of the veterans and is proud of their service, especially his father’s. Mr. Lyle was an officer in the U.S. Army.

“Whenever he has told me about the years he served, I’ve been pretty amazed and so happy he is my dad,” Dane said.

Kenny said he has been exposed to veterans when he used to visit veteran homes at his old school.

“It’s so meaningful to raise the flag and think of them,” Kenny said.

For those students who may be nervous about taking part when games resume next fall, Kenny said, “Don’t be.”

“You will remember it for a very long time,” he said.

“It’s a good thing to do,” Dane added.

“We are hoping to have a lot of kids [moving forward],” Mr. Lyle added. “I think right now we are yearning for leadership, and any opportunity that we have we should take advantage.”

One of the Student Color Guard Leaders could end up a general in the Air Force one day, he said.

“The idea is to expose kids to this,” he said. “It is the literal passing of the flag to future generations.”

**Pauline has always been passionate about educating and giving people the tools needed to succeed.** As a professor, analyst, Certified Financial Planner and recent *Crain's* Eight Over 80 honoree, she has impacted many and continues to inspire and inform as a volunteer and philanthropist.

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