SAYING THANKS



PHOTOS BY JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

The temperature was in the 90s Monday afternoon, but it didn't keep Seneca residents and others from around the Upstate from braving the heat to wave flags for visiting Marines, thanking them for their service.

Residents brave heat to welcome visiting Marines

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
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SENECA — Ilene and Mike Small live in Keowee Key, but the two have different accents than some of their Southern neighbors — many of whom act as host families for visiting Marines during the Honoring Their Service event.

Originally from England, the Smalls have been in the U.S. for more than 30 years.

Ilene Smalls said though the couple wasn't born in the states, supporting the U.S. military is still something they believe in.

"It's quite moving," she said.

As the temperature crept into the 90s Monday afternoon, the Smalls were among dozens who braved the heat in parts of downtown Seneca and on U.S. Highway 123 for a patriotic parade, where a motorcade led around 40 Marines into the Upstate.

The parade began in Easley and before 4 p.m. had made its way onto First Street in Seneca.

The Smalls and friends Ken and Carol Allen held flags and waved and came prepared for the smoldering heat with snacks, a cooler and lawn chairs.

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THANKS: Marines staying at Keowee Key

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"We find the shade," Ken Allen said. "We don't tend to leave the chairs until they come."

Though some sat, others stood in anticipation — including Oconee County and city emergency personnel, as well as city of Seneca employees who huddled in a crowd waving flags in front of city hall.

The ladies of the VFW Auxiliary in Walhalla had their own unique flag that read, "Welcome home. We're proud of you."

"We support our troops; we support our Marines," auxiliary member Sandi Hood said.

Her friend, Angie Burns, agreed.

"Every time we have anything that has to do with veterans — anything in the community — we come to support," Burns said.

Nearby, Seneca resident Rebecca Siers had four girls, including her two 10-year-old daughters, Olivia and Taylor, in tow and had set up at a cool space under The Arts Company's building.

The girls held flags and poignantly sat in front of an American flag that rested inside the business' storefront window.

By midday, the children had put on floppy hats to cover their eyes and Siers said she brought them, just as she does every year, so they will continue to support the military.

"We come every year," Siers said. "We had a family member that was in the Army, but we're very supportive of our troops, and it's important for the kids to learn what it's about."

Siers' mother, Catherine Lownsbury, said the family usually finds a spot at 7-Eleven, but made their way downtown this year.

Honoring the Marines and others' military service hits home for her.

"I graduated from high school in 1970, so Vietnam was a huge part of what went on for us," Lownsbury said, mentioning how enjoyable the Honoring Their Service event is each year.

"It's so much fun, and we have friends that do tubing with them and are a part of their activities, so it's wonderful."

The activities include three and a half days of outdoor events such as fishing, golfing, river tubing, hiking and archery — and most of all, relaxation.

Marines from Camp Lejeune, N.C., and the Marine Corps' South Carolina Wounded Warrior Regiment are participating in the activities this week and staying at Keowee Key.

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