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Veterans Day Ceremony

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Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "Veterans Day Ceremony" (2019). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 218.
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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on November 11, 2019

Location: Hendricks Chapel

Remarks: Veterans Day Ceremony

The Chancellor was introduced by student Katy Quartaro

Good morning. Like some of you, I started my Veterans Day celebrations this morning by rising at 5:00 a.m. so that I could participate in a 5K Veterans Day fun run around the Syracuse University campus. I've got to say there is something profoundly appropriate to start on Veterans Day and outside in the snow and sleet at 6:00 a.m. watching hundreds and hundreds of mostly cheerful folks uncomplainingly run the perimeter of the campus while leaders on each corner make sure you stay on course and don't get lost.

Those of you here who have served know serving often involves showing up and doing the job in all sorts of conditions while most of your fellow citizens are comfortably asleep. While I was running with some of you this morning, let me amend that... While I was running this morning and watching the Corps of Cadets and everyone else lap me at least once. While I was running, I was thinking about this ceremony in which I've participated now six times, and thinking about what to say, and the phrase that kept coming to me was, preaching to the choir. I wonder if you younger folks here understand what preaching to the choir really means. Back in the day, in the last millennium, when I was young, and most everyone went to church or synagogue, or places of worship each week, I sang in choir every Sunday at church. By the way, it was not remotely as good as the best university choir in the country, which you just heard.

But back then, we choir members always showed up regardless of the weather, both for services and for practices, and many of us did a lot of other odd jobs too. I was in charge of the snow shoveling and snow blowing on bad Sundays. Back then, preaching to the choir meant the pastor would use his sermon on a Sunday to lecture us in the choir on how important it was for us to show up every week and to take church seriously. This was very annoying. It was annoying because after all, we were already showing up and taking church seriously and if anyone should have known it, it was that pastor. Well here I am pastoring in a sense on Veterans Day ceremony, and for me, much of this nation's Veterans Day celebrations feel a bit like preaching to the choir.

On one day a year, there are ceremonies and speeches about veterans and their service to our country and they're attended each year heavily by the people who have served or the people who have always supported them in service. They are attended by the choir. Even as we go into the 19th year of the longest war in our history, that is still the way the call of duty is. And here I am yet again another year giving another speech to the choir about why veterans matter and why we should all be so grateful. So this year I wanted to do something a little different. Instead, I was to assure choir, that is you, that our university will always work hard to preach about veterans to the people who aren't even coming to church. And I want to assure the choir, that is you, that this university will remain committed our veterans more than any other university, every day, including on Veterans Day.

And to prove that, I tell you that this morning Vice Chancellor Haynie up here on stage is very hoarse Has been live on the air for four hours already to virtually every television media outlet you can imagine around the country, 23 and counting, sharing facts about veterans and their accomplishments and needs in this day and time. This week, folks from our Maxwell School Citizenship and Public Affairs and our IVMF launched the best program in the country, training veterans to run for public office. Twenty-two vets started

that program this week and I was told this morning that two have already been elected. We move really fast.

For more evidence this month, folks from our Institute of Veterans and Military Families have been conducting courses all over the country to facilitate success in civilian life for the more than 25,000 veterans we are training this year. This semester, folks from our Office of Veteran and Military Affairs have been working tirelessly to recruit veterans to our university as students, as faculty, as staff.

They are working on transfer and credit, human resources, on housing, on academic advising, on everything else so that we can continue to increase our veteran and military connected enrollment, which is now reached 1,375 students this semester, more than many of our peers combined. This year, we will complete the construction of and move into the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building, housing the National Veterans Resource Center, which I really think will be the best university facility in the world for veterans programs, for our ROTC, for outreach into the veteran and military community. It is amazing what's happening on this campus and around this world because of your commitment of people in this room today at this university to veterans. I am so grateful you are the choir.

Last week, our correspondent and a columnist for a prominent national higher educational publication visited this campus for the first time. He was blown away by the incredible array of veteran programming here, far beyond what he'd see anywhere else. At the end of his visit, the team arranged for him to meet with me in the Chancellor's office and he asks me exactly one question: why are you doing this? I responded by giving him the business case for our university serving veterans. One, I have been taught, by Vice Chancellor Mike Haynie and others.

I told him the truth, which is that veterans have made this a better university in every way that matters. They brought us better students, a better culture, a

stronger set of values, improved programming for all students and support for this university from a broad community and around the country that cares about veterans. The reporters responded by saying, yeah yeah yeah, I know all about that, I've seen it all day, that's not what I'm asking. I asked why are you doing this when so many other university leaders are not, so it was a personal question and I did not have a great answer. I never had a great comeback line when I really need it.

Before coming to Syracuse, I taught in five surely great American universities and every single one I had a few great students who were veterans and who were navigating through the university bureaucracy with great difficulty. Every one of those universities talk the talk about veterans, particularly on Veterans Day, but there were precious few veterans in any of those schools and those who were there felt more welcome storming Fallujah to Sergeant Major Kent. They felt more welcome storming Fallujah than walking onto an elite American university campus.

On each of those campuses there was one or two part time employees focused on veterans and then I came to Syracuse. And here I found and here I keep finding each day amazing people all over the place on the staff in the faculty, among the students in the community and the alumni working every day to enable veterans to succeed in our programs. People like the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs staff who organized this ceremony. People like Ron Novack, Lauren Pyland and Margaret Lambrecht. People in Syracuse University veteran Affinity Group that you just heard from, and the Student Veteran Organization, people in the Army and Air Force ROTC corps, people leading our community organizations and partners like ClearPath for veterans, People like Senator Robert Antonacci, who is the friend of this university and its veterans.

When I found people like these at Syracuse, I came to believe I found a university that really could walk the walk in supporting veterans, walk the

walk every day and walk the walk in a way that far outshine the rest of the elite universities in this country and that's why I think we are doing this and put simply that's we're going to continue to do with your help. We're going to walk the walk for veterans and for that I am always grateful to all of you. And now it's my great pleasure to introduce someone who embodies walking the walk and the very best of the United States military and that's our keynote speaker, the 16th Sergeant Major of the United States Marine Corps Carlton Kent.

Sergeant Major Kent served on active duty for three and a half decades. He's been a tireless advocate for service members and for their families. While serving, he was remarkably approachable to junior Marines. He is a native of Memphis, Tennessee. He served with distinction as a noncommissioned officer and staff. Noncommissioned officer. Over the course of his career, sergeant Major Kent served as a drill instructor, as a chief instructor at the Naval Aviation Officer's Candidate School and there helped to shape the next generation of Marines and their leaders. He completed US Army Airborne School and the Army Sergeant Majors Academy as well. Since retiring as the 16th Sergeant Major in the Marine Corps in 2011 Sergeant Major Kent founded Kent Campa and Kate Incorporated. This company helps provide our nation's veterans and their family members meaningful job opportunities. So please join me in welcoming the man who walked the walk for veterans, Sergeant Major Carlton Kent.

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