

TIMES LEDGER

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St. John's honors two generations of soldiers

BY ALEX CHRISTODOULIDES

St. John's University welcomed two generations of armed forces services members, those who served during and since World War II and those currently in the school's Army Reserve Officer Training Corps battalion, for its annual Veterans Day ceremony.

The event, held Friday in Council Hall after rain forced it indoors from the flagpole on the Great Lawn, also marked the 25th anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The college contingent lined one end of the room where Catholic and Jewish veterans and the Ladies Auxiliaries sat at tables facing the podium.

"Before you is a rare combination of the past and the future," said Maj. James Hamner, the new

commanding officer of St. John's ROTC battalion, about the event. He replaced Lt. Col. Brian Delaplane, who died suddenly Oct. 9.

"Today we find our servicemen and -women in places of danger again. And you can be sure that they are the best our country has to offer," he said.

Lt. Col. Andrew Lyons, Bronze Star recipient and associate director of

the University Freshman Center, praised the patriotism of all generations in the room.

"We know the true heroes are the ones who've sacrificed life and limb," he said. A Kevlar helmet and combat boots served as a tribute to those who did not make it home.

"You should rest easy knowing there are plenty of young men and women willing to take up the flag and defend their country," Lyons said.

Of the troops currently in Iraq, Lyons has a unique perspective as a re-

turned serviceman whose son has also served there at the same time.

"We thank you for the number of letters, cards and packages our sons receive" from members of the Queens community and veterans groups, he said.

This is the first war in recent history where the service members are all volunteers, Lyons said. "Everyone that's there went of their own free will, and their dedication to their beliefs and what this country stands for," Lyons said.