

Bardstown turns out to honor, remember Pruitt

Community reflects on her service and memory

BY KATELYN NORRIS
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

Nelson County had hundreds gather Thursday to honor Air Force Tech Sgt. Ashley B. Young Pruitt, who lost her life in combat last month.

Pruitt was brought home and her community came together to honor her on her final journey.

At 11 a.m. Thursday, a Kentucky Air National Guard C-130 transport plane landed at the Bardstown-Nelson County Airport, carrying Pruitt's remains.

Following a brief family visitation inside the plane, airmen performed the dignified transfer of her body, with other Air Force personnel and Junior ROTC members saluting while Pruitt's family observed the process. Pruitt's casket was loaded into a hearse to make its way to Houghlin-Greenwell Funeral Home, where public visitation was Friday and the funeral Saturday.

The funeral procession traveled through downtown Bardstown as hundreds of individuals lined Third Street and more lined up along John Rowan Boulevard. The procession featured dozens of first responders from Nelson County and beyond, and hundreds of bikers including two veteran motorcycle groups participating in the procession.

One of the many people in the attendance on Thursday was Shawana Stansbury-Root, a Bardstown native, who was one of the many students who



Airmen salute as the Kentucky Air National Guard C-130 transport carrying the remains of Air Force Tech Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, arrives Thursday at the Bardstown-Nelson County Airport.

PETER W. ZUBATY/Paxton Media Group

She said Pruitt was always someone who wanted to make a difference.

Johnson said she has the utmost respect for those who serve. She was happy to see her community of Bardstown put on such a display to memorialize Pruitt and honor her.

"It's important to come together for people who are making a difference out here," Johnson said. "I feel like we're honoring Ashley just because she has gone so far in life, and because she represents Bardstown. That is the real, true meaning she represents us and we have to come out here and represent her and stand up for her."

Several Nelson County veterans, and those from the surrounding area, showed up to honor Pruitt and support her family. Anthony Clayton served in the Army for 40 years and said it was an emotional moment for him to see his community come together for a fallen airman.

Clayton said anytime someone who served in the Armed Forces has passed away, he tries to be there.

"It just means a lot to me overall," Clayton said as tears welled in his eyes. "I've had several friends pass ... it just, I get, just emotions."

Brothers John and Michael McIntire traveled from Louisville to honor Pruitt. Michael, who served four years in Vietnam for the Air Force, said he felt he and Pruitt were on the same team and he wanted to honor her service.

John said what Pruitt was doing was important and he thanks her for her service.

"It's bad, what happened to Sergeant Pruitt, but she was doing something important," Michael said.



During the procession for Air Force Tech Sgt. Ashley Pruitt, community members including several veterans found way to honor the Nelson County native.

KATELYN NORRIS/Paxton Media Group

served in JROTC at Nelson County High School alongside Pruitt.

She said it was devastating to hear the news about Pruitt's passing, stating it completely rocked her world.

"Every one of us wanted to serve in some form or fashion, whether it be through our community, as first responders or through military," she said. "We know the risks, but as kids, we didn't think, we're like 'It's



People from the Bardstown community and beyond came together to honor Air Force Tech Sgt. Ashley Pruitt as her funeral procession made its way through the city Thursday. Her funeral was held Saturday.

KATELYN NORRIS/Paxton Media Group

never gonna happen, it's never gonna happen.' For it to actually happen to one of us, and we were such a tight crew, and it actually hit, it was just devastating. For it to be someone like Ashley, the one that was —

she was determined to always save the world, that was her, and it just, it didn't seem real."

Morgan Johnson also attended NCHS with Pruitt — she said she was a good person, a bright light and a great mother.



Jeffrey Hall, middle, plays cornhole with Jason Hall, right, Saturday at a community block party in a field that was covered in water last year by historic water levels.

KODEE BRINEGAR/The News-Enterprise



Items ranging from a potted flower to a birthday cake and even a family photo were on display Saturday at the American Legion Post 113 in Elizabethtown following a Military Child's Table Setting Ceremony. Each item on the table represents a special meaning for a military child.

KODEE BRINEGAR/The News-Enterprise



Emmeline Bowling, 9, left, and brother Carter, 7, make Legos Saturday in Colesburg while attending a community block party in Colesburg.

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FLOOD

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out. If it hits again, then I just redo it and start over again. We're prepared this time."

Patricia and Dale are still working on fixing their home, this time they said they added corrugated metal for an easier cleanup in the future.

"The first time it flooded, FEMA said this was not a disaster and nobody was helping us so we had to use all of our money to fix our house the first time and then, bam, it hits again," Patricia said. "But fortunately, FEMA did help us out and the

American Red Cross was here too."

Colesburg Baptist Church Pastor Tom Watkins said the 2025 flood waters climbed within 10 feet of the church doors.

"Emergency response teams were launching boats out of our parking lot to go rescue people in Colesburg," Watkins said. "It was quite the scene. I just praise God that no one was hurt."

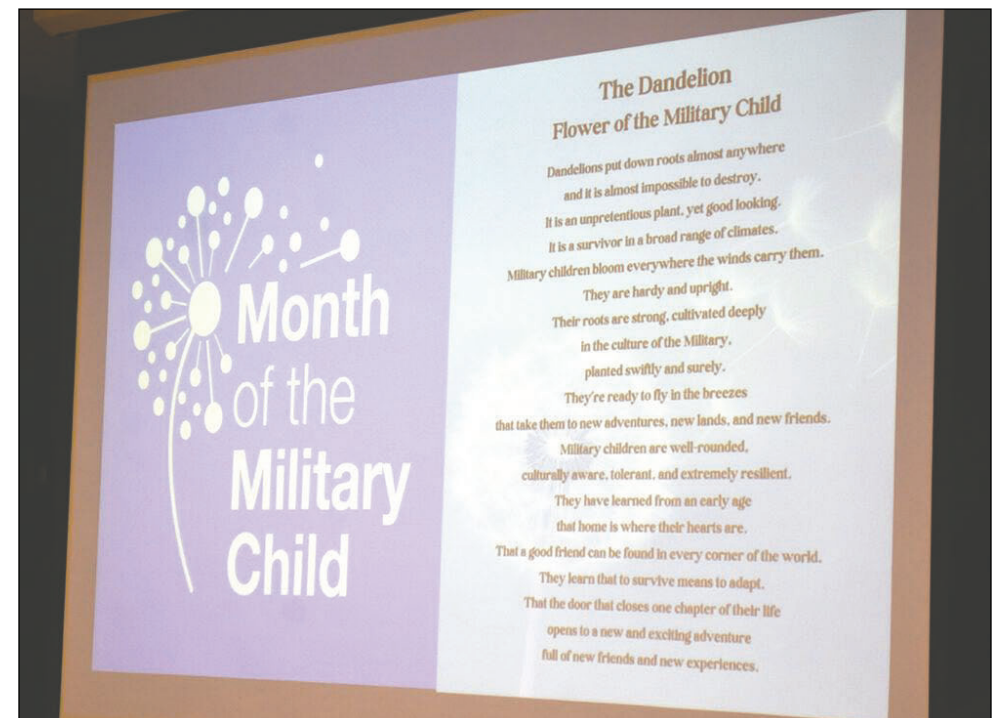
Watkins, who helped serve food to attendees at Saturday's event, said it was a great turnout.

"It's just a great thing having here a church and a community coming together. It's really been a good thing,"

Watkins said, adding that the devastation that families experienced is what he remembers most. "I've never seen quite five foot of water in someone's home and as it gradually came down the road, it was devastating for the people, it really was."

Watkins said he still remembers the clean-up efforts that were done after the water receded.

"The last of week April to the first of week of May, we're having to clean up the town and the families are coming together, the people are coming together to help each other clean up their yards," Watkins said. "Everyone here has been a blessing."



A poem depicting the link between military children and a dandelion was on display Saturday for anyone to read at the American Legion Post 113 event that recognized the Month of the Military Child.

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CHILDREN

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Arigno said that her 2-year-old daughter, Elena, is going to be her husband's biggest support.

"She tells him do his best job every day. Being new to the area, I can definitely see that the community shows support for all military families," Arigno said. "Where we were, we didn't really have support as military families, whereas

here we do notice a lot of support for the kiddos and encouragement for the kiddos' spouses."

Some of the struggles Arigno says military children face is when parents are deployed and can't be around as much.

"They have to learn that it's important for dad to work and we have to support him when he's doing stuff like that," Arigno said, adding that spouses need to be patient, particularly when a spouse is deployed. "Be patient and try to understand

that they're doing the best they can. They can't always be as present as they would like to be."

In addition to the many activities for the children, Radcliff City Mayor J.J. Duvall signed a proclamation recognizing April as the Month of the Military Child, which was presented by Councilwoman Toshie Murrell.

Following the proclamation, a Military Child's Table Setting Ceremony was performed by the American Legion Junior Auxiliary.