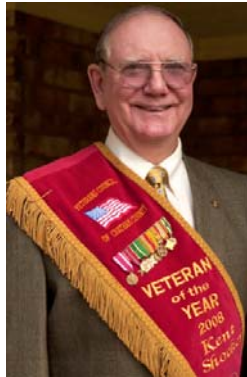




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Retired Marine Selected Veteran of Year 10/7/2008

Pamela E. Walck



Kent Shockey

Kent Shockey is many things.

A two-tour Vietnam War veteran. A 26-year veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps.

A mentor, leader, educator, producer.

And new to the list: Veterans Council of Chatham County's Veteran of the Year 2008.

"He's just top-notch," said Bill Quinan, chairman of the Veterans Council of Chatham County. "He's in just about every veterans organization you can think of and a leader in every one of them.

"He's an outstanding individual. A friend among friends and a veteran of veterans."

Long-time friend Richard Luetlich agreed.

"He's a producer, not a consumer," Luetlich said. "When he's in an organization, he doesn't sit back and just revel in what's being done. He produces, and that's a difference."

Luettich, who served in the Air Force, said Shockey has been not only a close friend but also a mentor.

"He's just a great guy, and I'm proud to know him," he said.

Shockey was officially presented his title - along with the Veteran of the Year sash - during a special banquet Monday night at the American Legion Post 184, Thunderbolt.

"Obviously, it's the highest honor any Chatham County veteran can have," Shockey said earlier Monday. "I will be representing all area veterans for the next year. ... There were many other deserving veterans."

A native of Kansas, Shockey was a commissioned officer in the Marine Corps and served two tours in Vietnam - in 1965 and again in 1969. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1985.

Last stationed outside Jacksonville, Fla., Shockey said he took a job in Chatham County as a Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps instructor.

"My wife and I loved the Lowcountry and knew we wanted to retire here," Shockey said. "It was really fate that brought me to Chatham County."

Since moving here, the retired Marine has poured himself into area veterans organizations, from the Navy League to the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

"When I have the opportunity to talk to groups, I always ask how many are veterans and if they belong to at least one of the veterans organizations," he said.

Too many times, Shockey said, the response is "no."

"We need new veterans to join our ranks," he said. "There are a lot of older fellas, the World War II veterans, who are dying off at an alarming rate, and the younger generation is not joining the veterans groups at a level we'd like."

"And we don't know why."

He does know that being involved with a veterans group is more than "sitting around drinking beers and sharing war stories."

"I think we need to maybe change some of our image," he said. "Some of the older Vietnam guys were not well-accepted into groups, so a lot of them got mad and didn't come back. We don't want that to happen to the current generation."

Shockey said one of his goals over the next year is to reach out to the younger veterans, including those from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

"We are all a band of brothers", he said.