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Fallen Marine awarded Medal of Valor **3A**

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Ruth Mickelson of the Faribault Elks presents Karla, Rue and Barry Erickson with the Medal of Valor in honor of the late Marine Lance Cpl. Caleb Erickson during a ceremony Saturday at the Faribault Elks Lodge. (Adam J.S. Holt/Daily News)

Marine Cpl. Caleb Erickson posthumously awarded Medal of Valor

By ADAM J.S. HOLT
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After the ceremony, Barry Erickson was told his son must have hung around a good crowd.

There wasn't anything he could say to disagree.

More than 70 friends, family members and others were in attendance as the Faribault Elks presented the Elks Medal of Valor to Barry and Karla Erickson in honor of their son, the late Marine Cpl. Caleb L. Erickson during a ceremony Saturday at the Faribault Elks Lodge. The medal is given posthumously to soldiers who gave their life serving their country.

"It's very, very special," Barry Erickson said afterward. "There's a lot of people. Some I know, some I've seen before. So many friends. Probably the main thing is, we're not going to let — as a family, we don't want his memory lost anywhere. We want him remembered for as long as possible. That's why we do these things and jump at the opportunities."

Cpl. Erickson was killed in February of 2014 as a result of injuries from an attack by a suicide bomber while serving in Afghanistan. The Erickson family recently started a memorial fund in his honor.

The half-hour program featured a number of speakers, including State President of the Elks Neil Johnson, U.S. Army veteran Jack Zimmerman and Brandon Gleason, a friend of Cpl. Erickson. State Rep. Brian Daniels was in attendance, as was U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar's southern regional outreach director, Chuck Ackman.

Johnson read a number of testimonials from friends who served with Cpl. Erickson, who remembered his sarcastic sense of humor, work ethic and willingness to help.

"Our veterans are a big part of what we are," Johnson said during his speech. "It is an Elks creed that as long as there are veterans, we will not forget you."

Zimmerman, who is originally from Cleveland and still lives in Le Sueur County, also spoke. Zimmerman helped organize a motorcycle ride for a memorial service for Cpl. Erickson last September in Waseca. Although he didn't know Cpl. Erickson personally, he's been a big supporter of fellow veterans and the Erickson family.

"I know that any situation that I would have been in, I would have been damn proud to have him be in the same hole with me or on the same line with me, or whatever it might be," Zimmerman said.

Gleason, a 2011 Waseca graduate, became friends with Cpl. Erickson over the course of 2011-12. Gleason recalled how he became close with Erickson after a wrestling match that winter, as Erickson came up to discuss a match he had just finished.

Gleason noted Erickson's outgoing nature, selflessness and determination as defining traits.

"I think we all admired him for that attitude to serve," Gleason said.

Ackman also read a statement from Klobuchar, who could not attend.

At the end of the ceremony, Barry, Karla and their daughter, Rue, were presented with the Medal of Valor. Barry later said the family wants to work on helping veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as Waseca's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon and Waseca's Jeremiah Miller, who runs a nonprofit called Free Flags for Veterans.

And with all the support from both those who knew Cpl. Erickson well and those who didn't, Barry said it was important to take every opportunity to remember those who gave their lives for their country.

"I want people to know that war is hell," he said. "It'd be horrible to forget our guys."

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