

Alumna Says ‘Thank You’ to Veterans with Her Students’ Help

Several years ago, Cara Daniello '15 was on an unclear career path, so she took a job at an Applebee's restaurant near her home. She was on a shift during the restaurant's tradition of giving free meals on Veterans Day to those who served in U.S. armed forces. "I loved listening to their stories; they were so humbled to be receiving a free meal," said Daniello, who today is an English teacher at West Morris Mendham High School. That experience left such an impression that she has devoted her time ever since to making sure veterans are not forgotten, especially by young people who may not have a personal connection.

This year, Daniello had her students, and students from other classes at the high school, write letters to veterans – 120 pages with 2-4 notes per page! -- thanking them for their service and dedication to our country's freedom. She emailed the letters to VA hospitals and veterans facilities across the country, utilizing contacts she made over the years.

"I am in a wonderfully unique position to reinforce to students that simple random acts of kindness can make such a difference to people," Daniello said, who added that her mantra for life is "Always spread your sunshine." Among the places that received letters were the NJ Veterans Network, Acadia Residential Healthcare, a VA in Boston, six Applebee's locations in New Jersey, the El Monte (California) Police Department, and every VA hospital in the country.

"I learned when I was a student at Ramapo the importance of being a global citizen and getting involved in the community," Daniello said, noting that she was an active participant in the College's Center for Student Involvement and the Civic & Community Engagement Center, among other clubs and organizations. "I know in five to ten years they might not remember quotes or when to use a semicolon, but when they can take the lessons and themes from what we read [in class] and apply those to their lives to be better people, that's when I know I'm doing my job right."

Daniello said she returns to the restaurant every Veterans Day to volunteer. "There's always so much more we can do to show our appreciation," she said.