



*Retiring Veterans Service Officer Whitey Shirley will be honored at a reception on the first floor of the Perkins County Courthouse on Wednesday, Feb. 29 from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Everyone is welcome.*

**By Jan Rahn**

*Managing Editor*

The public is invited to help Whitey Shirley celebrate his retirement from the office of Perkins County Veterans Service on Feb. 29—an event that’s difficult to arrange because heaven knows how much cake should be ordered. It would be easier to count the people in and around Perkins County who don’t know Whitey.

Come enjoy refreshments and wish him well in his retirement between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. that day.

New Veterans Service Officer Russell Hixson began learning the ropes back in September.

Whitey is known for his dedication to America’s veterans. He served on the County Veteran’s Committee for a period of 29 years before being approached by the board to see if he’d take the vacant Perkins County Veteran’s Service Officer position.

“I have always been very committed to veterans,” said Whitey. “I wasn’t quite ready for a full time job, as I was still recovering from the loss of a lung, so I told the committee I’d work part time (three days a week) and for only three years. I guess I didn’t stick to that, as that was back in 1991!”

Whitey owned Shirley’s Repair in Madrid from 1959-1982, which he sold due to health issues prior to becoming involved with veterans. And he made a difference in their lives.

In describing his duties as veteran’s service officer, he said those who have served their country and have suffered loss or disability as a result of their service are mandated by the U.S. Government to be able to receive help, whether it be medical, physical, or assistance for their family.

The county veteran’s officer provides service to those who qualify following their honorable discharge from any of the U.S. service branches.

Whitey’s duties have included being the advocate for the veteran through constantly updating his knowledge of the changes in policies and procedures monthly, filing paperwork, gaining compensation benefits, assisting with burials, headstones, handicapped equipment, supplies, pensions, widow’s benefits, educational benefits for dependents and Dependency Indemnity

Compensation (family compensation for a veteran drawing 100 percent disability).

"I took it upon myself to make sure all veteran's markers were placed in the cemeteries within the county, and to make sure if any were broken, they were replaced, and made sure our office had flags available for residents if they wished to purchase one," said Whitey. "The aspect I liked the most was the challenge of doing the best I could for veterans in need. It always feels good when one's life is one of service."

Whitey has been well deserving of every bit of the recognition he has received for the service he has provided for the county's veterans. In 2006 he received the Citation for Meritorious Service Award from the National Veteran's Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission.

"I have been blessed and honored to be able to serve the people of my community and county in a position where I could serve a cause I am totally committed to and one that has merit and honor," he said.

He has served the American Legion Post 271 for 58 years, been post commander for three years, and post service officer since 1961. For 57 years, he has belonged to the Perkins County VFW, has served for 51 years on 40 & 8, and was the Grand Chef DeGar du Nebraska (president of the state of Nebraska 40 & 8) in 1995.

Another honor to be proud of is being selected as the Perkins County Fair Grand Marshal in 2006.

His service and dedication to the Village of Madrid while living there is also evident. He served on the town board for 17 years and on the Madrid Volunteer Fire Department for 20 years.

Whitey has lived in Perkins County since his family moved to Madrid from Curtis when he was nine years old.

His service to his country was in the U.S. Air Force from 1950-54. He was in Biloxi, Mo., Hickam Field, Ohau, Hawaii, Long Island, N.Y, and spent seven months on Wake Island with air evacuation out of Korea. Most of Whitey's service career was spent on crash boats doing search and rescue missions.

Whitey was married to Betty for 49 years prior to her death in 2007.

When asked about his plans for retirement, Whitey jokingly said, "I've been offered a part-time job and am considering it—over family objections!" He said he also plans to run around with his dog.

He will also enjoy his two children, four grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Daughter, C.J. Rezac, had this to say about her dad:

"When I moved back here, I was totally amazed and surprised with the number of people who would come up to me, knowing I was Whitey's daughter, and tell me about all the good things he had done for them and their families.

"I had no idea he helped men, widows, families like he's done. I thought his job was to point veterans in the direction of services. I had no idea what a successful warrior he had been for our veteran's community and how diligently he'd educated himself, so he could be the best advocate possible for them.

"I am so appreciative that people helped me see him through their eyes, as it has been a source of joy to know that others have experienced what a wonderful, decent, honest, yet humble man Whitey Shirley is, and his depth of capacity for loving his family, community and nation is a rare blessing for all of us."

### **Hixon is New Officer**

Whitey's replacement, Veterans Service Officer Russell Hixson is eager to help veterans in any way he can and wants them to know he is available to them any hour of the day, any day of the

week.

Hixson is a retired Army veteran who wants to assist veterans and help them learn about all of the benefits available to them. He also has a goal of getting younger servicemen and women involved in the organizations available to them such as the American Legion.

Hixson said when he took the position that he loves working with veterans and he jumped at the chance to apply for the open position.

In 2008 he moved to Perkins County from Imperial, where he had lived since 1998. He was working at Frenchman Valley Coop at the time he applied for the veterans service officer position.