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Vets Draw a Crowd

Big turnout for city parade in wake of terror attacks

y Bobby Cuza
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parades go, there was nothing rticularly unusual about the thou-nds of spectators lining Fifth Ave-e yesterday to honor America's war roes.

But regulars of this 84-year-old fall adition said the crowd represented a arked departure from years prior.

"In the past, it's been so pitifully hall that I was really embarrassed," id Kay Badalamenti of Manhattan. his is much better than it has been past years.— believe me."

Exactly two months after their city as put under attack by terrorists, res-ents with a renewed appreciation for e military waved flags and cheered r the uniformed officers marching rough midtown.

Lifelong New Yorker Dave Rabinow-z said it was the first time in his 60 years he'd been moved to attend a Veterans Day parade. "This year in particular, I thought it was very important to be here," he said. "We've got to come out and show that you support the war. People have to see it. People have to say it."

Before kicking off the procession, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg and Sen. Charles Schumer took part in a ceremony at Madison Square Park.

"All New Yorkers and all Americans now understand maybe better than ever the tremendous contribution of our veterans," Giuliani told the crowd. "We respect you. We honor you. America always will. You're our most special citizens."

Calling them "veterans of the domestic war," Giuliani also recognized the city's uniformed officers — police, fire, EMS and Port Authority — who "through their bravery, turned [Sept. 11] into the proudest day in American history."

If local uniformed personnel shared a bit of the spotlight yesterday, Bloomberg also grouped them together with other veterans in his remarks, and Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik received a hearty round of applause — military veterans didn't seem to mind.

"We can appreciate it," said Art Ferrante, 55, of Bayside, an Army paratrooper in Vietnam. "We know that they put their lives on the line."

Originally called Armistice Day, to observe the anniversary of the end of World War I, the holiday was renamed in 1954 to commemorate veterans of all American wars of the 20th Century.

Larry Hendrickson, 48, of Franklin Square, said he's been taking his 10-year-old son, Christopher, to Memorial Day and Veterans Day Parades since the boy was 3.

"I think it's important that he learn to give thanks to the people that served," Hendrickson said.

Hendrickson also noted the beefed-up crowd at this year's parade.

"The previous parades have been anemic. I'm sure this [Sept. 11] helped a lot of people come out here today that haven't been for many years, which is a good thing," he said. "It's a sad reason why, but a good thing that at least they're finally waking up."

Schumer said honoring our veterans is vital to the nation's survival.

"As long as we remember those who for generation after generation were willing to lay down their lives for us, we will stay a great country," he said. "The day we forget is the day the sun sets on these United States of America."

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