

Spa provides special care for those who served



1 of 2 photos:

Army veteran Mary H. Beamer, left, talks with cosmetology student Brandi Dooley after her manicure at Natural Elements Spa and Salon in Chesapeake on Veteran's Day, Thursday, Nov. 11, 2010. (Steve Earley | The Virginian-Pilot)

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Mary Beamer retired from the military nearly 30 years ago, but her service to veterans continues.

Veterans Day is special to Beamer, and Natural Elements Day Spa and Salon left her feeling special, too. Beamer's hands sparkled, thanks to a courtesy manicure from the spa, which rewarded more than 200 veterans with free manicures, pedicures and massages on Thursday.

The spa was able to handle the extra work thanks to area cosmetology schools that donated their students' time.

Beamer, a Newport News native who now lives in Virginia Beach, said she has nothing but fond memories of her time in the service.

"I worked everything," said Beamer, 74, a nurse whose license remains active. "I delivered babies; I worked in the burn unit."

Beamer joined the Army in 1954 at age 17, going through basic training at Fort Lee. She completed two tours in Germany and one in Japan, but much of her satisfaction stemmed from working in a burn unit in Houston. Vietnam vets passed through regularly, and Beamer forged lasting bonds with many of the men there whose spirits needed lifting.





"It felt good to be helping them," Beamer said. "I've always enjoyed helping other people."

Today, Beamer is state representative for the Disabled American Veterans, the first black woman to hold that position. She regularly visits veterans hospitals and is particularly attuned to the needs of female veterans, whom she described as an often overlooked group.

Master Chief Evan Brockington received a manicure alongside Beamer on Thursday. A 26-year veteran of the Navy, Brockington served on four ships and was part of the team that evacuated New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. He received a Navy commendation medal for his efforts.

Though Veterans Day can often feel like a forgotten holiday to many, it remains significant to Brockington.

"When I'm wearing my uniform, people often come up to me and thank me for serving my country," he said. "That makes me feel really good."

Brockington declined the offer of a pedicure Thursday afternoon, as did Beamer.

"Nah," she said. "I don't feel like pulling off my boots and stockings."

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