

## Honor our seniors

The spectacle of the World Cup that just concluded in Johannesburg, South Africa, was fascinating to me as a soccer fan and an observer of world events. I missed most of the preliminary games but I was able to watch the final match between Spain and Netherlands on Sunday afternoon. The high point of the closing ceremonies that included appearances from the likes of singer Shakira, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and former U.N. Secretary Kofi Anan, was the introduction of Nelson Mandela, the nation's anti-apartheid icon and secular saint. Mandela appeared to a thunderous clamor of applause and blasts from thousands of vuvuzelas. I read from the blog of a journalist present at the event that seeing Mandela was one of the most memorable moments of her life, just knowing what he had done for South Africa and the world. What is it about the appearance of elderly, famous public figures that evokes these warm, emotional responses from the general public?

I think that there is something attractive about people who have lived long, productive lives and have made major contributions to society. We want to be near them, to touch them and to be able to say that we had once experienced an event where they were present. We need to feel the sense of history that they carry around with them on their faces and their frail bodies.

I recently marched in a parade as part of the American Legion Color Guard. As we kept time trudging down the street to the marching tune of a high school band's steady beat, I spotted an old soldier on the side of the road. He rose gingerly from his wheelchair as the colors passed and I chose to break rank and go over, shake his hand and give him a military salute. Why, I wondered later, did I make such an impulsive gesture? Upon reflection I know now that I wanted to show him the respect he deserved for having served in World War II as a pilot ferrying wounded G.I.s back home to stateside hospitals. But it was also recognition of him as an older adult who had contributed to society and played a significant role in the history of our country.

I hope that we will continue to honor our senior citizens as living historians and holders of the values that have made our nation great.