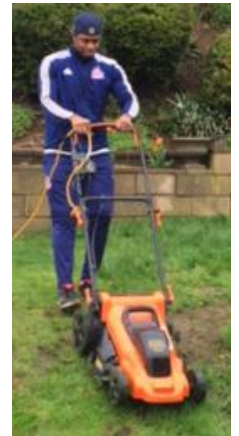


PAY IT FORWARD – New England College Rugby Team Service Day



On a wet and windy April 26, 2017, the New England College Rugby Student-Athletes spent a day of service, friendship, and learning with Rick Erikson a 91 year old veteran, in Watertown, Massachusetts. The connection between Rick and NEC Rugby began through a conversation with NEC Rugby Head Coach Tal Bayer and NEC Medical Director, Laura Anderson about ways in which the team might engage in activities and service that connect to the values and mission of the school.

Laura brought up the idea of working with Rick who she had met through Honor Flight New England. Honor Flight New England flies WWII, Korean and some Vietnam veterans at no cost to Washington, DC for a day to visit their respective memorials and be honored for their service and contributions to this country. That friendship was further expanded when Laura and Coach Bayer organized a NEC Pay-It-Forward Service Day with the Rugby team helping out Rick on a wide range of projects that included all yard work and spring clean-up.



Aside from an enjoyable day spent outside working with friends and teammates, the highlight of the day was having lunch with Rick and hearing about his life and experiences. The opportunity for the team to hear first-hand about the hardships, sacrifice, joys and successes of a life well lived were an invaluable part of the time spent with Rick. He was a wonderful inspiration and reminder of the determination, work ethic, and values that helped shape this country into what it is.

When Rick was in his late teens (roughly the age of most of the current NEC Rugby team) he served as a Navy Signalman 2nd Class on board the Navy destroyer USS Lewis during WWII. His ship was in the South Pacific – most notably during the battle for Iwo Jima. From the deck of his ship, he witnessed the United States flag being raised by our troops on the island on top of Mt. Suribachi. He witnessed first-hand the moment that was captured in the iconic and [Pulitzer Prize winning photo](#) by Joe Rosenthal that is one of the most widely recognized photos from the last 100 years. That image also served as the inspiration and model for the Marine Corps Memorial in Washington, DC.