Billy Lee wants to do everything he can to help support the military and military families and their children.

As a longtime coach and teacher, Lee has seen countless students with ties to the military come through the Lowndes County schools. Now as a counselor, Lee is working with New Hope High School Library Media Specialist Lindsey Beck to help the school earn Military Star status. As part of that initiative, Lee and Beck have organized a Veterans Day program on Monday, Nov. 13, that will feature 20-30 service members giving short presentations in classrooms during first and second period throughout the school. The service members will be from all branches of the military.

The event is one of three New Hope High will hold this school year to represent military veterans and satisfy the requirements to become a Military Star school.

“We want to support the military,” Lee said. “I was in the military 38 years. I was Army National Guard and I retired as a sergeant major and had tours in Iraq. We also did hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, charity drives, everything. The military is a big part of American culture and heritage, and without the military we wouldn’t be where we are.”

Administered by the Mississippi Department of Education, the Military Star School program is designed to help schools respond to the educational and social-emotional challenges military-connected children face during their transition to a new school and keep them on track to be college, workforce and life-ready. Military-connected refers to children of service members on active duty and in the National Guard and Reserves. The program awards public schools a Military Star designation if they have certain resources in place to accommodate children of a current or former member of the military.

Caledonia Elementary School, Caledonia Middle School and Caledonia High School are the Military Star schools in the district.

Lee said New Hope High also will have a day in which everyone is asked to wear purple to support military families. He said the third event will be a military career day, but a date hasn’t been set.

Teachers at New Hope High already have started to prepare for the festivities by decorating the doors to their classrooms.

Lee, who is the liaison for military families interested in having their children attend New Hope High, is looking forward to putting up pictures of NHHS graduates who have served in the military throughout the years.

Beck has created a series of slides that will be featured on the televisions at the school. She hopes the slides will create a culture of conversation about joining the service and recognizing those who went to New Hope High for their service.

“We’ve worked to ensure each slide has a combination of graduates from a variety of classes,” Beck said. “The hope is our students will connect with the photos of our most recent graduates and also be exposed to our long history of NHHS service. By also varying the branches displayed, we remind them that joining the service can be as multi-faceted as they are. Options abound for students interested in pursuing a military career.”

Beck said the slides also will be printed and displayed in the school’s commons area on Veterans Day, along with some gorgeous, framed portraits of previous NHHS service men and women that have been saved through the years.

New Hope High Principal Matt Smith praised Lee, Beck and Columbus Air Force Base Liaison Amber Meiborg for working together to implement a plan to help NHHS become a Military Star School this year. He said Lowndes County Superintendent Sam Allison challenged every principal in the district during the summer to do what was needed for their schools to earn that designation. He said Lee was a natural choice to lead the efforts at NHHS.

“Mr. Lee gathered the documents and immediately went to work planning and finding out the necessary steps for us to take in that endeavor,” Smith said. “The Veterans Day salute / program is something we would do every year. Mr. Lee came up with the idea of having former military veterans come to speak to our classes in a smaller environment so it could possibly be more intimate. Months later and after a ton of planning and help, Mr. Lee, Mrs. Beck and the entire staff have gotten involved and are putting the final touches on the program.”

Lee said teachers will set up a pot luck lunch for the service members; the New Hope Student Council will furnish ushers to escort them to and from each class and give a tour of the campus; Kevin Edge, a pastor at New Journey Church, will provide a coffee cart for veterans and teachers during break; and the New Hope High band will play patriotic music during the break. Lee also thanked New Hope High counselor Jenny Box for her assistance in organizing the program and lunch and Sammy Sullivan and The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) for its help securing speakers.

Lee said some of the speakers will be combat veterans while others will talk about their experience in the military. He said the variety will help students gain a deeper appreciation of serving their country and Veterans Day.

“The event will give students a way to experience history in a different way,” Lee said. “It will help them understand why we have an army, an army of volunteers, and that we should be thankful for all of the people who help protect us and our country.”