

Valley residents energized by inaugural grandeur

By WILLIAM ROLLER, Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, January 21, 2017 1:10 am

Washington, D.C., is a world away and may seem like a backdrop for Hollywood movie, particularly for those from the West but a lucky few from Imperial Valley had the chance to watch history in the making at the nation's capital Friday.

Two Valley 4-H students, Seth Hilfiker and Dillon Sanchez were among 19 4-H members from California to represent the state at the swearing in of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States. Both were selected to attend because of their own history of civic service and both took the initiative in leadership roles within 4-H at which they demonstrated a poise for command, as noted by their Imperial County 4-H Program representative, Shana Abatti.

Reached by phone just after President Trump took the oath of office, Seth seemed to still be in an afterglow of the majesty of the proceedings. "Seeing it all surrounded by the crowd was far more exciting than it could have been on TV," confided Seth. "I was in a section of a lot of supporters who chanted for Trump. The Trump supporters were definitely out in numbers."

"He gave a great speech ... and it made sense," Seth added. "It's been four years now, so everybody was really enthusiastic. Everywhere you looked there was a flow of people."

One more Valley native now a resident of Orlando, Florida, and a federal grants coordinator for U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, Brittany Corfman attended the inaugural because she wanted to witness history. "I was fortunate enough to take time off to help with Senator Rubio's (presidential) campaign and I wanted to see the end of the process. It was emotional, 18 months of blood, sweat and tears," she recalled. Yet still she was impressed when Trump said at his address



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Jose Duenas poses for a selfie Friday in Washington, D.C. COURTESY PHOTO

that every country looks to the U.S. as for a smooth transition of power regardless of party affiliation. And that is a great example of American democracy.

Another favorite son of the Valley who attended the inaugural actually served in an official, if modest, capacity. Technical Sergeant Jose Duenas was part of the Air Force street cordon. More than 8,000 people marched in the mile and a half inaugural parade down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House. “We rendered a salute to our commander-in-chief as his motorcade passed through,” recalled Duenas. “It was an indescribable honor. I never would have imagined I would be doing this some day.”

Duenas is based at the Quantico, Marine Ground installation, Virginia. He is a non-commissioned officer in charge of the personal readiness unit. They prepare personnel for contingency deployment. And the armed forces have been a part of the presidential inaugural since day one, he noted.

“I was truly honored to be a part of our historical event,” said Duenas, “because not everybody in the armed forces gets to be in the inaugural. Only a certain amount of each of the branches gets selected.”

Based in the D.C. metro area Duenas has already visited the White House. He describes it as an amazing experience as he had seen it in the movies yet never dared dream he would have the opportunity to see it in person.

“I truly love Washington, D.C., all the monuments, there’s so much history, so much to learn, especially for my two daughters,” said Duenas. “I’ve been here two years and I probably haven’t been to half the historical sites. It’s awesome.”