

Mt. Vernon Airport: Home to two amazing veterans memorials

For nearly four years, both memorials have been honoring veterans, local and abroad

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Not only does Mt. Vernon have an amazing airport, but there is a veterans memorial housed inside of the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport that is truly awe inspiring.

The Jefferson County Hall of Honor and The Colonel R. D. White Veterans Museum are two complimentary memorials to American veterans.

It started in 2009 after an EAA fly-in event. R. D. White thought that it would be a good idea to do something for veterans. His idea was to put pictures of veterans on the walls of the airport with information about the veteran contained in the picture.

The initial idea was for the pictures to be seasonal, but some people thought it might be even better if the pictures could stay up year round.

Before the Airport Authority Board of Commissioners would approve the project, they asked for detailed plans and for a permanent committee to be formed.

Before long, personalized tributes were being made for veterans of all walks of life. As the Hall of Honor began picking up momentum, individuals started to donate historical items they received from veteran relatives or friends.

The Hall of Honor and Veterans Museum started in January 2010 and was officially dedicated in June 2010, according to Chris Collins, Mt. Vernon Airport manager.

HALL OF HONOR

Now the Hall of Honor is in the second phase of its project and the Veterans Museum is filled with a wide array of authentic military artifacts.

"What you see is a great example of what teamwork can produce," stated Collins.

He expressed that the different ideas and opinions of the individuals working on the Hall of Honor and Veterans Museum resulted in a creative and successful memorial.

Each tribute is dedicated to a single veteran.

"The Hall of Honor is strictly to honor our honorably discharged veterans," stated Don Davis, a member of the Veterans Museum Committee.

He said that said the tributes are printed "in beautiful color on photographic paper."

"No two are alike," stated Davis.

Davis compared the tributes to snowflakes, saying that each one is uniquely different, which is fitting since the veterans all served in different places at different times.

Davis estimated that there are about 500 tributes honoring 500 different veterans. He informed that when you walk through the airport's lobby, the initial display is for local soldiers that were killed in action, missing in action, or a prisoner of war. As you move into the hallway of the Koziara Terminal, the first phase of the Hall of Honor tributes are proudly displayed.

The Hall of Honor is in the second phase of the project. The first phase consists of 433 individual tributes proudly displayed in the main hallway of the Koziara Terminal, according to Sentinel archives.

Tributes that are part of the second phase are located in the Koziara Terminal Banquet Room. Collins reported that there are approximately 750 panels in the banquet room, and about half of them are already filled.

The tributes are arranged simply in the order in which they were received. Collins



VETERANS MUSEUM — The R.D. White Veterans Museum at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport holds many different items, including uniforms, weapons and newspaper clippings, from times of combat by U.S. soldiers. The museum and Hall of Honor pay special tribute to the many local veterans who served their country.

stated that "A veteran is a veteran," and remarked how interesting it is that veterans of all different generations can appear next to each other on the wall.

There are several graphic designers that work hard to create an individualized memorial of each soldier's service. Graphic designers Cliff Christensen, Karen Spiegh, Jona McReynolds, and Clarence Duckworth all contributed their creative craft to the project.

The design of each tribute is up to the graphic designer, but there is a general method that they follow.

The tributes always have at least one professional photograph, and it is encouraged to submit additional photos as well. The tributes exhibit

medals or ribbons the veteran received. There is also a section at the top that lists the veteran's rank, branch, unit or vessel, years of service, and locations served.

Collins said that the Hall of Honor designers "hit it out of the park with graphic design and display."

The Woodlawn Veterans Committee has financed many of the panels for the tributes, which cost around \$100 a piece. Collins also stated that Bob and Brenda Laughlen played an integral part in the start of the memorial. Collins said that they have also received significant donations from the community.

Another great feature about the tributes in the Hall of Honor is that all of them

are accessible on the Internet. Collins remarked that "The unique thing about this is, if we've done a tribute of a loved one, then you can see it in seconds."

The tributes can be accessed at www.veteran-shallofthonor.com, where each tribute is listed in alphabetical order.

Davis pointed out that the Hall of Honor being on the Internet allows the memorial to be known throughout the nation, which is a benefit to distant friends and family, or veterans honored in the memorial that are not from the area.

Collins estimated that about 95 percent of the veterans honored are from Jefferson County, with the remaining 5 percent being from all

over the country, according to Sentinel archives. He explained that sometimes the mother or father of a veteran will live here and their children will have moved away, or veterans who aren't originally from here will settle down in Jefferson County later in life.

According to Collins, the popularity of the Veterans Museum is "slow to build," but he said that he definitely believes that it is catching on. He informed that the register book outside the museum is a testament to all of the individuals that have visited the memorial, many of which are out of state residents who experience it while traveling

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Sentinel File Photo

...ND THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE — Nancy Schutte sings "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Jefferson County Hall of Honor dedication ceremony held at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. Retired U.S. Army Lt. Colonel R.D. White, LEFT, and County Board Chairman and retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Colonel Ted Buck, MIDDLE, both spoke at the ceremony.



Sentinel File Photo

HALL OF HONOR — Visitors look at portraits of Jefferson County World War II veterans along with details about their service at the Jefferson County Hall of Honor in the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. There tributes are arranged in the order they were received, and veterans from all different wars and branches can be found next to one another.



Sentinel File Photo

HISTORY LESSON — Clarence Duckworth, RIGHT, gives a guided tour of the veterans Hall of Honor to Woodlawn 4-H youth at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport on Saturday. Also pictured, FROM LEFT, are retired Lt. Colonel R.D. White, Emma Caserotti and her father, Phil Caserotti.

Museum
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through Mt. Vernon.

Davis is proud of the range of veterans displayed at the Hall of Honor. He said that there are four veterans of the Civil War, including Colonel R. D. White's grandfather, Augustus White. There are three veterans from the Spanish American War and "tons from World War I and World War II," according to Davis. He said that there are also a good amount of veterans honored from more recent wars.

There is a long history of veterans in Davis' family. He informed that his family was in America before it was its own country. Davis himself enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1951.

Even though Davis has a tribute in the Hall of Honor, he modestly said that he doesn't feel qualified to be up on the wall because he doesn't feel as though he went anywhere or did anything significant during his service.

Davis has a deep appreciation for the Hall of Honor and the veterans that are memorialized through it, but he did point out that it takes a lot of hard work to keep the Hall of Honor and the Veterans Museum going strong. "It's almost overwhelming to keep this going," stated Davis.

Clarence Duckworth, one of the graphic designers who make the tributes for the Hall of Honor, explained the rough process of creating a tribute.

The designers need a picture of the veteran, preferably in uniform; a copy of their discharge papers; any medals, commendations, citations, or awards they may have received in service; a brief history of military service; and anything else that was important to the veteran.

Duckworth has done tributes for all kinds of veterans. He said "We don't care where they are from, a veteran is a veteran."

According to Duckworth, "The only question we really ask is do you have an honorable discharge. If not, then they cannot go on the wall." He added that "If they have an honorable discharge, then we are very proud to put them on the wall."

Since several individuals create the tributes, each designer's method is different. "Each person has their own way of doing things," said Duckworth.

Though there are similarities in all of the tributes, the style of the designer and the service of the veteran make each one a unique memorial.

There is no formal assignment process for tributes that the designers create. Duckworth informed that a specific designer may be requested, but typically, whoever is available and willing to do the tribute handles it.

Duckworth has his own tribute in the Hall of Honor, which he designed himself. He reported that it wasn't too different to create his own tribute. He said that he went through his scrapbook, found things that he wanted to be featured, and went from there.

A crucial resource that Duckworth uses when creating a veterans' tribute is the Internet. "It's a very good tool to help," said Duckworth. He gave an example of one tribute he created where he didn't have much information past the individual's name and record. Through the Internet, he was able to look up the veterans unit and find out where the veteran died.

Duckworth informed that all of the designers really enjoy the process. He said that it is a lot of hard work, but the best part is the learning experience.

"I enjoy doing it. You learn," said Duckworth. "Each one is different."

VETERANS MUSEUM

Collins informed that the Veterans Museum came into fruition through the Hall of Honor. Individuals that brought in information for tributes offered to donate war relics that they or their family members owned.

"It wasn't very far into making the tributes that area veterans' families started asking us questions, like, 'Hey, I have a uniform of my dad's or grandfather's, would you like to put that on display?'" Collins said. "The museum grew out of that. So we started with just one small room and probably within 90 days we had filled that room and expanded it."

The Veterans Museum features everything imaginable from all wars fought by the United States — from the Civil War to Desert Storm, according to Sentinel archives.

The museum started in the front room, but eventually ran out of room for all of the pieces being donated, so they moved with the permission of the Airport Board.

Included in the two-room museum are items donated by veterans and their families, some as permanent donations and some only temporary. Items such as uniforms and letters to books and photographs and firearms line the walls.

Many of the items have been donated by families of local veterans. There are newspaper clippings, uniforms, helmets, hats, pictures, medals, a large motorcycle equipped with a gun, and other weapons, including two captured Japanese infantryman rifles with bayonets that White personally confiscated, according to Collins.

"Our exhibits change constantly," stated Duckworth.

Davis informed that the bike they have on display in the museum is a 1942 courier bike with approximately 45 miles on it. He also mentioned that the Museum has a Doolittle map from the raids on Tokyo.

The Museum even has some of the uniforms from its namesake Colonel R. D. White's World War II glider pilot uniform and his white army tuxedo are both featured in the Museum.

Davis also said, "You can't forget the ladies," and pointed out that there are military artifacts from female service members. The Museum displays Maxine Modert's dress uniform and nurse's uniform from World War II. Davis informed that she had served in the Western Pacific Theatre.

"We've got all kinds of things," stated Davis.

He also said, "We have a beautiful library also."

When it comes to picking a favorite item in the Museum, Davis said he didn't have a favorite.

"How can you pick and choose really?" replied Davis.

He said, "When you get down to it, they all have the same value to me."

Davis expressed his deep appreciation for the meaning behind the Museum. "It makes you really appreciate our great Country," said Davis. He also praised everyone involved in keeping the museum going, saying: "It takes special people to be so diligent in protecting it."

The Veterans Museum is going so well, that Collins informed that the Committee is becoming selective on uniforms, since so many have been donated. He said that the museum is still expanding, and the Committee is still looking for rare and unusual items.

Both the Hall of Honor and the R. D. White Veterans Museum are continuing to grow, both in size and in popularity. The Mt. Vernon Airport encourages any veterans anyone interested in American military history to come check out both memorials.

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