

THE PATRIOT

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Bellevue honors fallen Vietnam veterans

BELLEVUE — Nearly 100 people braved a windy and cold day March 28 to attend the National Vietnam War Veterans Day program at the Fallen Soldiers Memorial in Bellevue. The city has held a similar program since 2012.



These four Vietnam veterans wait for the start of the National Vietnam War Veterans Day program in downtown Bellevue on March 28. From left are: Jim Migrant, of Bellevue; Bob Hahl, of Clyde; and Bellevue residents Dennis Norman and Ted Newsom. Each man served in the U.S. Army.

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Eleven local Vietnam veterans were honored with the placing of individual flags in the Fallen Soldiers Memorial: SP4 Roy C. Beasley (U.S. Army), PFC William R. Dumas (U.S. Marine Corps), PO3 Dennis H. Enderle (U.S. Navy), PFC Charles E. Frederick (Army), PFC Lamar D. Frederick (Army), Cpl. Jesse J. Garrard (Marines), PFC Thomas G. Idle (Marines), Lance Cpl. Kenneth R. Keefer (Marines), PFC Terrance J. Kudro (Army), PO3 Ronald L. Shaver (Navy, Marines), and Sgt. William J. Weidinger (Army).

The family of the late Jim Griffin, who lived in Bellevue for most of his life, was presented with a flag. Members

of the Marine Corps League raised the flag to half staff in his honor. Born in Willard, Griffin served with the Marines for three years and was in Vietnam for 18 months. Representing his family at the program were his wife Diana, son Mike, daughter Kelly, and his grandchildren, Drake Griffin, Gabby Griffin, Emily Mougey, and Kaylea Pertz.



Dennis Norman, of Bellevue, is wrapped in the Quilt of Honor presented to him during the National Vietnam War Veterans Day program in Bellevue.

The Grateful Threads made a Quilt of Honor, which was presented to Dennis Norman, who served in the Army for three years. In Vietnam from 1966 through 1967, he served with the 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry assigned to the 25th Infantry Division. Norman is a Bronze Star recipient and earned a Combat Infantry badge. In 2011, he retired from the Bellevue Police Department as a captain.

Rides available

The Huron County Veteran Service Office continues to offer transportation services to any medical appointment or other services, such as errands to the post office or grocery store.



At least 48 hours before your appointment, call 419-668-4150. Be ready to provide the following: Your full name; phone number; date, time and location of your appointment; and the last four numbers of your Social Security number.



Ryan Wolfe or Cary Ashby, of the transportation department, will call you the day before your appointment to confirm your ride. Masks are mandatory due to Covid compliance and for your and our drivers' safety.

Blessing Basket Food Pantry assists veterans

WILLARD — Ryan Wolfe has been volunteering for the Blessing Basket Food Pantry in Willard for three months.



A Huron County Veteran Service Office van is full of food from the Blessing Basket Food Pantry in Willard to be delivered to area veterans.

A part-time driver for the Huron County Veteran Service Office, Wolfe helps distribute food. At first he delivered to nearly a dozen veterans; now he said that number has increased to 20.

The Blessing Basket Food Pantry has served nearly 1,270 area families so far in 2021. Pantry coordinator Vonda Patrick said a total of 4,189 people have received food through the end of March and of those individuals, 1,921 were adults who are 18 to 59 years old.

Started in October 2018, the Blessing Basket Food Pantry is based out of the Willard Church of God, 4551 Willard West Road. The pantry has a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank of Lorain, Ohio, which is where the pantry buys its food.

“From October 2018 to October 2020, the Blessing Basket has served 4,226 families and 15,892 people. These numbers seem to rise every month,” Patrick said.

Among the pantry volunteers are veterans. One of the regulars is Tom Hicks, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1971 through 1977. From 1978 through 1993, he was in the U.S. Army.

Veteran Joseph Levi Jr. also volunteers. He served in the Army from 1963 through 1965.

“(He) helps us in the pantry every time we serve the people,” Patrick said. “He looks much younger than 80 and is also a great guy.”

The Blessing Basket Food Pantry is open on the first and third Saturday of each month from 12 noon to 2 p.m. For the rest of the year, it will be open: June 5 and 19, July 3 and 17, Aug. 7 and 21,



Joseph Levi Jr., an 80-year-old U.S. Army veteran, regularly volunteers for the Blessing Basket Food Pantry.

Sept. 4 and 18, Oct. 2 and 16, Nov. 6 and 20, and Dec. 4 and 18.

A truck delivering the food comes to the pantry on the first and third Tuesday of each month. For the remainder of 2021, that schedule is: June 1 and 15, July 6 and 20, Aug. 3 and 17, Sept. 7 and 21, Oct. 5 and 19, Nov. 2 and 16, and Dec. 7 and 21.

Blessing Basket is always looking for volunteers. For more information, call pantry coordinator Vonda Patrick at 419-357-4642 or email her at preacherswife.vp@gmail.com.

Hometown Heroes kicks off in Norwalk

NORWALK — A big crowd gathered for the kick-off event for the Hometown Heroes banner program in downtown Norwalk on May 14.

Mayor Dave Light honored Wende Mersereau, who initiated the program; Lori Wagner, owner of Insight Type & Graphics who created the banners; city employee Rich Brutsche; Hans Hoffman, co-owner of Freight House Pub & Grill; Dean Hales, VFW Post 2743 financial officer; Rob Wolcott, American League Post 41 color guard commander; Jacqueline Mersereau; the Norwalk Area Visitors Bureau; Huron County Veteran Service Office; Marine Corps League; AMVETS Post 1965; and DAV Chapter 62. American Legion Post 41 served as the color guard.



Norwalk Mayor Dave Light honors Lori Wagner (left) and Wende Mersereau during the kick-off event for the Hometown Heroes banner program.

Wende Mersereau, whose son serves in the U.S. Navy, said the banners should make people think about the military personnel who have sacrificed for the choices that people make. Volunteers put up 91 banners in downtown Norwalk.

Jerry Huffman, commander of DAV Chapter 62, said Norwalk should be proud of the people represented on the banners.

Mersereau was pleased there were 40 banners during the earlier pilot program.

“Thank you again to all the veterans,” she told the crowd.

Local Vietnam veteran tells his story

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bob Gainok, of Norwalk, was interviewed by Cary Ashby, HCVSO community coordinator and part-time driver, to celebrate National Vietnam War Veterans Day on March 29. The video is available via Facebook on the "Huron County Veteran Service Office" page.



Norwalk resident Bob Gainok served as a security police officer with the U.S. Air Force.

NORWALK — While serving in the U.S. Air Force, Bill Gainok was inside Air Force One very briefly.

He was at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines for 18 months. Gainok worked in the customs and immigration department, where he checked passports and commercial and military aircraft that came from the United States. In 1968, Gainok said Air Force One, with President Lyndon Johnson, pulled into Clark Air Force Base "right in front of my office on the tarmac."

"They couldn't leave it on the tarmac in Thailand or Vietnam because it was too dangerous," he added. "I went out there to visit it and get the paperwork. They had to have it sprayed inside because of the rules in the Philippines to disinfect it."

Gainok talked to some of the non-commissioned officers who were guarding Air Force One.

"They said, 'Just go up there and get the paperwork.' So I walked up the stairs and I stepped inside the cabin," he said.

Gainok graduated from South Amherst High School and immediately entered the Air Force in the fall of 1966.

"I was in the security police. Originally it was called the air police," he said. "Now they use the word 'security forces.'" Being a security police officer was natural for Gainok since his father was a part-time sheriff's deputy and his grandfather was a police officer.

"My father was in World War II and he was in the Army Air Corps as a control tower operator," he said.

Gainok originally was stationed at Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Iosco County, Michigan.

"After I was there a couple months, they came around and (said) we're looking for people volunteering for either dog school or to be in something called safe side and you'll be trained (in) Army Ranger instruction. You'll probably go to a very hot spot," he said.

Figuring he would be there for a relatively short time, Gainok volunteered. He first went to England Air Force Base in Louisiana and then was shipped to Fort Campbell in Kentucky.

"That's where we had three months of very intense training with Army Rangers who were Air Force personnel," he said. "We didn't go paratrooping; that's the only thing we didn't do."



U.S. AIR FORCE

Gainok received training in counter-insurgency warfare and set up ambushes and patrols in the woods of Kentucky and Tennessee.

“I was in heavy weapons,” he said. “I was an assistant gunner on a mortar.”

In 1969, Gainok and his air wing went from Kentucky to Vietnam. He said their temporary duty assignment was to “train other troops in counter-insurgency warfare” who were already in Vietnam. He was there five months and two weeks.

“I was 21. I didn’t really think that I was invincible,” Gainok said, but he said he had to rethink things the first time he saw “the first rocket coming in” and hit the ground.

“You see the sparks fly and then you hear the concussion,” he added.

When Gainok returned home from Vietnam, he said he “didn’t get any real negative things ... except on the news maybe.” He remembered when he was attending the Firelands campus of Bowling Green State University, there were people who were “speaking out against the war.”

“And to be honest, I was too. There were a lot of other veterans who were too. It wasn’t quite right; something was wrong here,” said Gainok, who has no problem telling anyone he served in Vietnam.

GLCAP addresses veteran homelessness



Will Weinheimer has worked for GLCAP for the last six years.

Did you know that the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP) has a family advocate working at the Huron County Veteran Service Office?

Will Weinheimer covers Huron, Erie and Lorain counties. The Clyde native and graduate has worked for GLCAP for the last six years.

The GLCAP Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program provides housing assistance and other needs for veterans who are homeless or facing homelessness. According to GLCAP, SSVF allows those veterans to “regain self-sufficiency through providing stable housing, case management, and other services.”

Weinheimer also has nearly eight years of experience in the education field.

“I enjoy working with and assisting veterans. I have a lot of family and friends who are veterans; some are still in the service. I just admire veterans for their courage and selflessness and what they have done for our country” he said.

For more information about GLCAP, call 1-800-775-9767 or go to www.glcap.org.



Meet the HCVSO drivers

Our drivers offer transportation services for any medical appointment or other services, such as errands to the post office or grocery store. At least 48 hours before your appointment, call 419-668-4150. Be ready to provide the following: Your full name; phone number; date, time and location of your appointment; and the last four numbers of your Social Security number.



Cary Ashby



Mike Greene



Ronnie Hibbard



Tom Lovitt



John Martin



Terry Mercer



Tom Rusynyk



Fred Walton



Ryan Wolfe

Upcoming veteran events

Monthly museum trips: The Huron County Veteran Service Commission is offering any Huron County veteran and a guest free admission and transportation to the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus. The trips are on the second Wednesday of every month through December 2022. A HCVSO van leaves the office at 7:30 a.m. and returns about 4:30 p.m. To reserve a spot or request more information, call the office at 419-668-4150. All reservations must be made at least one week before the trip.



Shad McCoy and his son, Zach McCoy, perform May 14 after the Hometown Heroes kick-off ceremony in downtown Norwalk.

Woodlawn Cemetery

June

- 14 - Flag retirement ceremony, noon at Marsh Field pavilion, Monroeville
- 25 - Team RWB Firelands meditation hike, 10-11 a.m. at 205 S. Old State Road, Norwalk

July

- 5 - 4th of July Parade in Norwalk starts at 10:30 a.m.

August

- 28 - Veteran of the Year golf outing at Millstone Hills Golf Club, 2315 Euclid Road, New London

September

- 11 - Inspire New London Salute to the Services, 7-9 a.m. at New London Recreation Park & Campground
- 11 - 9-11 Ceremony, 9:50 a.m. at Fallen Soldiers Memorial, Bellevue
- 11 - 9-11 Remembrance Ceremony, 8-10 a.m. at Huron County Veterans Memorial Park, Norwalk
- 11 - Reverse raffle at American Legion Post 547, Monroeville, social hall: 1 p.m., reverse raffle at 3; for tickets, see a member or go to Post 547

November

- 13 - Marine Corps Birthday Ball at Beirkeller, Bellevue; happy hour starts at 4 p.m.; for tickets, call Cheryl Fout at 419-405-5857

May

- Fish fry at American Legion Post 547, Monroeville: Every other Friday 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and 5:30-8 p.m. through the end of September
- 28 - Memorial Day Celebration at Norwalk Memorial Home parking lot, 10 a.m., with three-volley salute and "Taps" afterward at American Legion Post 41
- 31 - Memorial Day parade in Bellevue, 9:30 a.m. to the Bellevue City Cemetery, with lunch for veterans afterward at VFW Post 1238; in case of inclement weather, ceremony will be at Post 1238
- 31 - Memorial Day events in Monroeville: 10 a.m. parade starts at Monroeville Local Schools; ceremony at Commons Park, with lunch for participants and guests afterward at American Legion Post 547
- 31 - Memorial Day events in New London: 7-9:30 a.m. breakfast at American Legion Post 292; three-volley salute at 8:30 at Grove Street Cemetery; parade starts at 10 at Post 292
- 31 - Memorial Day events in Norwalk: 7 a.m. free donuts at VFW Post 2743; parade starts at 9:30; ceremony at 10 at



Members of the Marine Corps League raise a burial flag in honor of the late Jim Griffin during the National Vietnam War Veterans Day program in Bellevue.