

Local Veterans Honored at WWII Museum

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

The National World War II Museum in New Orleans tells the story of a war that truly changed the world. The museum had special meaning for thirty recent visitors from the Rochester area, including several from Perinton, all in their 90s. The group included 29 WWII veterans and one woman representing “the home front.” During the war, she worked in a Rochester optical factory, turned over to war production. Each veteran was accompanied by a “guardian”, most often a family member.



Local WWII Navy veteran Hank Siebert Jr. at the National WWII Museum with his daughter, Sue Daly of Perinton.

The Gary Sinise Foundation provided financial support to make the trips possible, and have code-named the adventures, “Soaring Valor.” You might remember Sinise from his memorable role as “Lieutenant Dan” in the 1994 Tom Hanks film, *Forrest Gump*. American Airlines provided free charter flights, while the elite flight crew volunteered their service, without compensation. This was the eleventh trip sponsored by the Gary Sinise Foundation since the initial trip, in August of 2015, and the first from this region of the country.



Fairport veteran Charlie Barranco received a birthday melody performed by the Victory Belles during lunch at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

From start to finish, our Rochester area WWII veterans were welcomed like the heroes they are. As our flight taxied to the runway, airport personnel on the tarmac waved American flags and saluted the vets. At the airport in New Orleans, countless employees and travelers, young and old, lined the walkways. They shook the hands of our veterans, cheered, and offered thanks for the veteran's service to our country, so many years ago. It was more of the same at the hotel in downtown New Orleans, where staff and patrons alike cheered the arrival of the veterans.

The museum is a modern marvel. Far more than simple static displays, visitors are mesmerized by an audio-visual interactive experience. Aspects of the war unfold before the visitor's eyes, from both a historical perspective, and through personal accounts of the soldiers that were there. Our veterans were treated as honored guests at the museum. Indeed, it is their museum.



The veterans were surprised by "mail call" on the flight home. Each received letters of love and thanks for their service, written by friends, family, local students, and others. Here Fairport resident Lou Masciangelo reads one of his letters.

Our Rochester area veterans greatly enjoyed their time at the National World War II Museum. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to serve as a guardian on the trip. It was wonderful to witness our veterans from Fairport, Perinton, East Rochester, and beyond engulfed in the love, respect and admiration of everyone they encountered.

Historians from New Orleans will soon be dispatched to our community, to meet with our veterans and personally record their stories. The recollections of our local veterans will be permanently incorporated into the collection of the National World War II Museum.

Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian: August 2, 2018