



Photos courtesy of Honor Flight New England

Above and at left, World War II veterans from New England traveled earlier this year to Washington, D.C., to see the World War II memorial. The trip was made possible by Honor Flight.

## World War II vets recruited for 2014 trips

HOLYOKE – On Dec. 7, a community partnership will remember Pearl Harbor Day by pledging to support World War II veterans from the Pioneer Valley on a special flight to Washington, D.C.

The Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, Holyoke Community College, Holyoke Visiting Nurse Association / Hospice Life Care and VFW Post 801 in Holyoke are collecting applications from World War II veterans to go on the next flights, which will take place in the spring, summer and fall of 2014.

There are 105 Honor Flight chapters around the country, and terminally ill vets from any war are accepted on a pri-

ority basis. After serving World War II vets, the organization will move on to veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars. The Pioneer Valley applications will be sent to Honor Flight New England, the regional branch for the Honor Flight Network, a non-profit organization created to honor veterans with a trip to Washington.

On Nov. 7, the movie, "Honor Flight," a 2012 documentary about the program, was shown to more than 250 people at a special Holyoke premiere at Holyoke Community College. In the audience were several World War II veterans, who said they would like to participate in the program. Many found the night of honoring service to be very emotional.

"It means a lot honoring the veterans that have given so much to this country," said Lloyd Askew, a World War II veteran from Ludlow who served in the Army Air Forces.

Joe Byron, founder of Honor Flight New England, spoke to the audience at the movie and noted the importance of the program in honoring World War II veterans.

"It really is a humbling experience to be a part of this," Byron said. "Our World War II veterans have done so much for our country, and this is the least we can do."

Byron was thanked after



Harvey LaFleur, right, of Chicopee, is a World War II veteran who served from 1943 to 1946. He took an honor flight to Washington, D.C., on May 19. Here he is shown at a premiere of "Honor Flight" at Holyoke Community College.

the movie by four area World War II veterans who had flown on an Honor Flight.

"It was an amazing experience," said Navy World War II veteran Charles Kovitch of Chicopee, recalling his Honor Flight two years ago.

Kovitch presented Byron with a \$1,000 check on behalf of American Legion Post 337 in Aldenville.

"Everywhere we went, people were there to thank us, and it was just such a beautiful day," said Kovitch of his day in Washington.

Time is truly of the essence,

says Byron. Between 600 and 900 World War II veterans pass away each day across the nation. At the Soldiers' Home, where about half of the 300 veteran residents are from the World War II era, about two to three veterans pass away each week. The average age of the World War II veteran is 90 years old.

"This is a race against the clock," said John Paradis, communications director at the Soldiers' Home. "Our goal is to sign up as many World War II veterans who want to visit the memorial built in

their honor and to spend a day in our nation's capital."

The committee will also help identify guardians for the trip – family members or volunteers who assist and take care of the veterans participating on the Honor Flight throughout the duration of the trip.

Area World War II veterans should contact Brian Willette of VFW Post 801, a committee member, who will assist veterans with completing the application for the Honor Flight. Willette can be reached at (413) 262-1031.

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