

Vox Pop

Several weeks ago I had the opportunity to experience the Honor Flight. I heard about it previously and thought it consisted of taking veterans on a trip to Washington, D.C. That in itself would be a very generous gesture and a great opportunity for the veterans. However, we soon found it was that and so much more.

My husband, with 14 other Vietnam vets from the Medford area and other veterans from various wars, were contacted saying they would be going on Honor Flight No. 22 out of Wausau on Monday, Oct. 12.

Wife of veteran tells of her experience, gratitude to Never Forgotten Honor Flight trip

We were asked to arrive at the Howard Johnson Hotel early Sunday afternoon so the men could meet their respective guardians. The guardians traveled with the veterans to assist them whenever necessary. Ken's was Lynn Talg and she is a wonderful lady who is currently in the military. She, along with all other guardians, did a great job. We now have a newfound friend.

After we met with Lynn, the guardians, their husbands, and the vets and their wives (and significant others), were treated to an evening which included dinner and entertainment. They played music from each branch of military and it was quite a treat.

The next morning at 4:30 a.m. there were buses to take everyone to the Central Wisconsin Airport. Once there, the vets went one way to board their plane and the wives were sent upstairs to wait for the plane to depart. We were offered coffee and other breakfast items while waiting. Not only were the veterans treated well, so were their partners. Finally, about 6:30 a.m., the plane departed, complete with a water salute. Wives were transported back to the hotel for breakfast and a day of planned activities. They suggested we be back to the hotel by 4:30 p.m. to be ready for the buses to take us back to the airport.

When the vet's plane arrived at Washington, D.C., they were met by another water salute and people waiting and cheering as they got off the plane. They then proceeded to the various war memorials for all branches of the military. A very rewarding tour.

The buses arrived to take the wives over to the airport. I cannot begin to describe the experience once we arrived. Hundreds of people were waiting — friends, family, neighbors and others wanting to show their appreciation and support. They carried signs that read "You are not forgotten," "You are my hero," and "Welcome home" and waved American flags. The energy was electric and so exciting.

There was a center aisle roped off and each wife and partner was escorted down this area by military personnel to a special place to wait for their veterans. We were seated where we would be the first to see them when

they walked through the door. There was a gentleman that kept us informed where the plane was and when it was expected, along with a band playing music. We all waited. When the plane landed and our vets arrived, everyone went wild cheering and waving their flags. Each wife then joined her husband and walked down the aisle. The crowd was cheering and thanking them for their service. Military, other veterans and people in general were shaking their hands and saying thank you for your service. It was so emotional and heart warming. I'm sure all of the veterans (from each respective war) enjoyed and appreciated the celebration and trip, but I think it was especially rewarding for the Vietnam vets. When they left on Flight 22 they were going on a journey looking for closure. Remembering the young servicemen they had once been, feeling somewhat unappreciated and fighting for our freedom, in a war that was never declared.

All vets said they had never been treated so well and appreciated the kindness of friends and strangers alike.

I cannot say enough about the Never Forgotten Honor Flight. There are so many people who work behind the scenes making sure this goes off smoothly. They donate lots of time and effort to make it a success. All expenses were paid for by generous donations and fundraisers. I am sure all vets who participated in the Honor Flight will continue to be involved and support the cause both financially and emotionally so others can have this experience.

This event left such a lasting impression on everyone whose life it touched. It was an unforgettable experience for all at the airport who witnessed veterans who returned home to a hero's welcome. This was so much more than just a trip to Washington, D.C., to see the memorials as I first thought. This wonderful journey would not have happened without the hard work and dedication of many. It was so appreciated by the veterans and their families. Many thanks to the Honor Flight committees and all the other people who made this possible. You will not be forgotten.

— **Tomi Hemmer, Medford**

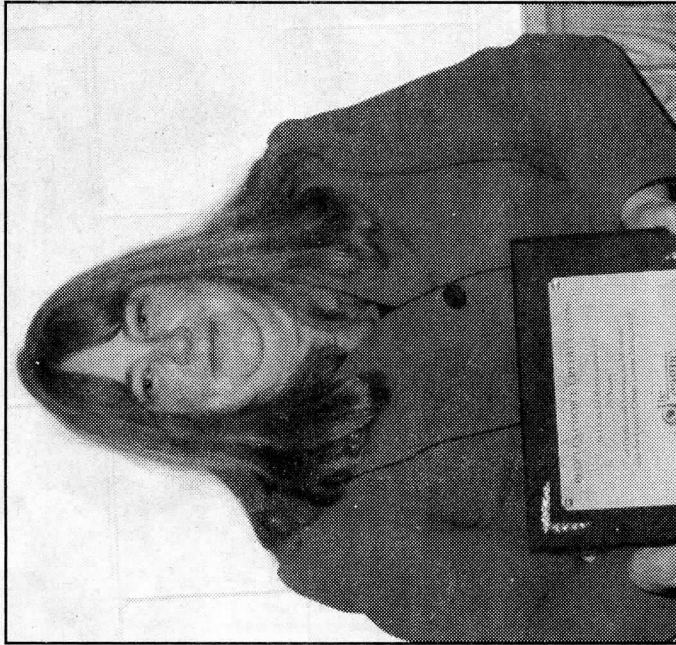


photo by Brian Wilson

75 years

Mary Henrichs, president/CEO of Peoples Choice Credit Union, accepts a plaque commemorating the 75th anniversary of the credit union's founding. The presentation took place during the Wisconsin Valley