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(Editor's and News Director's Note- Veterans begin arriving at the Howard Johnson's Motel in Rib Mountain from out of town this Sunday, April 17 at noon. The pre-flight dinner for 98 vets and their guests takes place there from 4 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. Vets and guardians arrive at CWA check-in starting at 4:15 a.m. Monday morning. The Honor Flight departs from CWA at 7 a.m. and returns Monday evening at 10 p.m. to a Welcome Home Ceremony. The Never Forgotten Honor Flight organization based in Wausau serves veterans in these 10 counties: Vilas, Price, Oneida, Rusk, Taylor, Lincoln, Langlade, Marathon, Wood and Portage.)

Massive Volunteer Effort Underway for Third and Fourth Honor Flights.

(Wausau) Approximately 200 more World War II veterans will fly to Washington, D.C. on two separate flights this spring thanks to ongoing financial donations and the efforts of more than 80 volunteers. "We're ready to send one flight on Monday, April 18 and plans are well underway to send a second flight two weeks later on Monday, May 2," says Mike Thompson, co-founder of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight, a non-profit 501c (3) corporation that coordinates and funds the effort. "The logistics of flying just one plane load of veterans to the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. are very complex and time-consuming. We simply couldn't do it twice in two weeks without a tremendous commitment from our volunteer board of directors and many, many other volunteers."

The public is invited to help welcome home the vets at 10 p.m. Monday night (April 18) at the Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee. A color guard, band and hundreds of supporters are expected to attend.

Thompson estimates there are less than 10,000 World War II veterans still surviving in the 10 county region served by the Never Forgotten Honor Flight. "We are losing too many of our World War II veterans with each passing week, so we decided we needed to do two trips this spring. We want to accommodate as many as possible," he says.

A third Honor Flight is tentatively scheduled for next fall and still has openings for World War II veterans.

“We are trying to get every World War II veteran to participate,” says Thompson.

“Unfortunately, we’re finding that too many World War II veterans are reluctant to go. Some think they didn’t play a large enough role in the war. Others are concerned about medical issues. Our board doesn’t buy any of those excuses, and hopes that those who have decided not to take part in an Honor Flight will reconsider and apply. We have highly skilled physicians and other health care professionals on each flight to take care of any medical issues, and we really want to make sure every veteran feels welcome regardless of what their duties were in the war. It’s a tremendous experience they will thoroughly enjoy.”

Veterans and guardians interested in taking a future Honor Flight must complete an application at: www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org or contact the organization at 715.573.8519. To help distribute applications to veterans who might not have access to a computer, Honor Flight organizers are encouraging people to download an application from the Web site and help a veteran fill it out and submit it. Veterans are selected based upon the order in which the applications are received, and preference is given to World War II veterans.

With fewer World War II Veterans applying, Korean War veterans are encouraged to apply as well. Guardians should be 18-69 years old, able to lend physical assistance to the veterans and willing to pay the \$500 cost of their trip. Completed applications should be mailed to the Never Forgotten Honor Flight, P.O. Box 5056, Wausau, WI 54402-5056.

As a newly formed 501c (3) corporation, contributions to the Never Forgotten Honor Flight are tax deductible. Checks can be made payable to the Never Forgotten Honor Flight and mailed to the address above. Donations also can be made at the Community Foundation of North Central Wisconsin or online with a credit card at www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org

North Central Wisconsin’s Never Forgotten Honor Flight was organized in late 2009 as the nation’s 77th regional Honor Flight and Wisconsin’s fifth. The Wausau-based organization was certified by the National Honor Flight Network office in Springfield, Ohio on December 11, 2009. More information and photos of previous trips are available at www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org.

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