

Raritan to unveil “Wall of Heroes”

Writer seeks public’s help in locating family members of our fallen heroes

“A Wall of Heroes” honoring all Raritan Men who died defending our country will soon grace the Raritan Municipal Building.

Currently in front of the Municipal Building is a plaque that bears the names of those from Raritan who made the ultimate sacrifice. However, this plaque, which was dedicated in 1998, only lists names; it does not tell anything about these men. This “Wall of Heroes” will have photos, tell where they lived, and provide some information about them.

There will be military photos along with the original newspaper article that told of their death for 25 Raritan men from World War II and the one from the Korean War. For Raritan men who died in the First World War only the name will be listed as unfortunately there are no known photos or newspaper articles about them. Only “casualty lists” of that era survive to this day.

Research for the Wall of Heroes project has discovered several Raritan men who died for their country that do not appear on the current plaque. The World War I section of the plaque only lists Sante Moretti and Angelo Simonetti and then states “and those others whose names are known only to God”. Back in 1998, when the plaque was unveiled, not all the casualties from a war that ended way back in 1918 were then known or could be found. However, today the local newspapers from those years are now available on microfilm at the Bridgewater Library. Also “World War I Casualty Lists”, complete with hometowns, can be found on the internet. From these new sources six additional men from Raritan who died in “World War I” have been identified. Their names will appear on the wall.

Not only are there additional men from the First World War, but recently it has come to light that a sailor from World War II was overlooked when the original plaque was created. That sailor is Joseph Moretti. Born in 1910, he lived on Doughty Street in Raritan. Joseph would attend the local Raritan schools and was a member of St. Ann’s Church. When Joseph was 17 years old his family moved out of Raritan, where they were sharing a home with a relative, to their own home in Somerville. When World War II broke out Joseph joined the Navy. He served on the ship *The USS Bunker Hill*. On May 11th 1945, his ship was hit by a Japanese kamikaze pilot. This resulted in a large fire that killed hundreds of U.S. sailors - one was Joseph Moretti. At the time he had been manning one of the anti-aircraft guns on the edge of the ship. A surviving sailor would later tell the Moretti family that some men under the intense fire that the Japanese were inflicting thought it suicidal to stay at their battle station so they left, but Joseph Moretti stayed at his post which resulted in his death. Knowledge of Joseph Moretti became known when this author interviewed Joseph’s brother Gene Moretti who is serving as The Grand Marshall of this year’s Basilone Parade. Gene, now 97, had a vast and interesting scrapbook that contained many photos and articles from the war. After learning about Joseph Moretti this author consulted with his Raritan historical consultants and found unanimous agreement that Joseph Moretti, who lived in Raritan till he was 17 years ago, indeed belongs on Raritan’s Wall of Heroes.

The “Wall of Heroes” display will be on the second floor of the Raritan Municipal Building in the lobby outside of the courtroom. The wall space is 19 feet long by 5 feet high. In addition to the photos of the fallen heroes the wall will have two special photos that were taken overseas during the war of Raritan soldiers visiting gravesites of Raritan men.

The lobby with the “Wall of Heroes” is too small to hold an unveiling ceremony, so the unveiling will be done before the frames are hung on the wall. This ceremony will be held on a yet to be decided date. The frames will be unveiled one at a time, hopefully by a family member of the deceased. Since their deaths occurred at least half a century ago, it will be a challenge to find family members for all the heroes. In the case that no family member can be found (or is able to attend) a local veteran will be chosen to unveil the frame.

Currently we are searching for the family members of our fallen heroes. Many have already been found, but we ask the public’s assistance in finding other family members.

For the World War II list we need family contact information for Dominic Baldini, Charles Dougherty, Francis Harcar, Michael Mazepa, Jerry Ottavianno, and Frank Passarello.

As for the “World War I” list, it will be a long shot to find contact information for any of these men as the war ended in 1918, but we will still ask our readers. Raritan’s eight “World War I” casualties are Tony Carnevale, Peter Kaushoffer, John Kline, Andrew Kollar, Peter Leibig, Sante Moretti, Felice Petrocelli, and Angelo Simonitti.

If anyone has family contact information or photos for any of the men listed above please contact Bruce Doorly at bdoorly@verizon.net or (908) 581-1917.

To view photos and the 1940s articles about these men logon to www.raritan-online.com

A new book entitled “Raritan’s Finest Hour” that tells the story of Raritan during World War II also has photos and information on this men. It can be purchased at Agway in Raritan.

The “Wall of Heroes” has been made possible by a donation from Ed Danberry of Civic Duty Partners.