

Pittsford students learn about veterans

A fourth-grade teacher at Pittsford's Thornell Road Elementary School has found a creative way to help bridge the generation gap between her students and our local veterans.

Toni Stevens-Oliver's fourth-graders have recently published a 30-page book featuring the biographies and war-time stories of almost two dozen local veterans.

Over the course of several months beginning last October, the students interviewed 23 members of Pittsford's Rayson-Miller American Legion Post 899, then spent a few weeks writing, rewriting, editing and polishing those stories for publication.

Stevens-Oliver explained that creating the book was just the latest chapter in what has been a long-standing relationship between the students and the post. The relationship began when Commander Al Herdklotz came to speak with her class on Veterans Day almost four years ago.

"We have been working to find meaningful ways to connect our veterans and students to the benefit of both," Stevens-Oliver said.

As for the book, "The goal of this project was two-fold," she added. "We wanted to create personal relationships between our senior veterans and fourth graders and publish (their stories) in a way that would allow us to share about our veterans with the larger community."

The finished product is a handsomely bound volume featuring the stories and full-color illustrations of each of the veterans, and information about the Rayson-Miller Post and Honor Flight Rochester. The book also has a cool, digital augmented-reality component. Using the BlippAR app on a phone or tablet, readers can access short video clips from each veteran's interview.

In a ceremony held March 20 attended by the veterans, school district and town of Pittsford officials, the students dedicated and presented a book to the Rayson-Miller Post 899. They also gave copies to their school library, the Pittsford Community Library and the Pittsford town historian.

Herdklotz was among the veterans interviewed.

"It was a great experience for members of our post," Herdklotz said. "Quite a few of our members were saying, no ever asked me about my service, or they did just in passing."

"I think what Toni has done is closed the generation gap. I think the students have a better respect for what (the veterans) have done."

It's a lesson which many even extend to veterans in the students' immediate families, Herdklotz added.

"I've heard several of the students say, 'He's never talked about (his service) but next time we get together, I'm going to find out just everything about him that I can.'"

At a reception following the ceremony, the veterans and students asked each other to autograph their books, and the students introduced "their veterans" to their families. Stevens-Oliver said that many parents in attendance commented they didn't understand just how important and meaningful the project was until they saw the veterans' reactions and how the students interacted with them.

It was a proud teacher moment.

"(The students) worked above and beyond to get this project done," Stevens-Oliver said. "It was the most motivating project I've ever done. ... Every single one of my kiddoes edited, revised, went back to the videos,

doublechecked their facts, doing extra research to make sure they understood it as they wrote it.”

“They took such pride in doing this assignment. That’s a teacher’s dream.”

“I think that some of the most valuable lessons my students learned were the ones taught by our veterans as they shared their stories with us, those of duty, honor, sacrifice, service, friendship and patriotism. Who better to teach these lessons to our children than those who have lived them in the service to our country?”

Pick of the Week

The Rochester Game Festival returns to the Irondequoit Public Library, 1290 Titus Ave., on Saturday, May 5. from noon to 5 p.m. for a special spring showcase.

Dozens of professional developers, hobbyists, and students from the Rochester area and beyond will be on hand to demonstrate their video games and tabletop games. Attendees will also be invited to play many of the games and try them out for themselves.

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.rocgamefest.com.

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During a group photo after the ceremony, the veterans surprised the class with a very their very own special thank you. PROVIDED



East Extra

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