

Coffee with the Mayor

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This will be a different coffee this week. The usual topic is to describe a local coffee I've had then talk about a city related item. With the 4th of July this week I want to talk about a project that has been my passion.

In January 2023 I was concerned about all the veteran photos on the wall at Shields Hardware. They are a true treasure to this community and knew that Jim Shields was a couple years away from either selling the business or retiring and didn't know what Jim's intent for the photos after either option. Looking to engage support for the potential of relocating the photos, I briefed both the Veteran's of Foreign Wars and the American Legion of the idea. The initial intent was to gauge support for the project and not funds. I also spoke with the Elks organization, again looking for support only. Since I was running for the mayor position, I made it clear this was not a campaign issue. It was separate from anything city related. When I briefed the Civitan Club they allowed me to set up a table at their annual 4th of July Ham Breakfast to encourage veterans to submit a photo, adding to the collection. This brought several more photos.

I asked a local student to collect the names and branch of service for the veterans displayed. At that time there were over 200 photos framed and on display. Jim personally made every frame used in the display. He had arranged with Lamar Imaging to print one free 8"x10" veteran photo that can be used for display from any size photo. The folks at Lamar have been very supportive of this.

Before the 4th of July, I sat down with Jim and presented my idea of relocating the photos once he either retired or sold the business. I understood the importance Jim placed on the display and had no intention of proceeding if he wasn't in support of the project. He readily understood the intent and was extremely supportive as he had not considered what would become of the display after a change in status.

At that point, I worked with a local law firm to establish a nonprofit organization. Concurrently, I worked with a local accountant to file the appropriate paperwork. Last September, State and Federal recognition was approved and the Veterans Hall of Honor was officially formed with myself as president and Jim as vice president and a dedicated board of directors. The initial meetings were focused on possible buildings to not only relocate the photos but sufficient enough, not only to add more photos, but to add a digital library of veteran stories told either by themselves or family members.

During this time, I understood Greene County was in the process of procuring the vacated National Guard Armory. At the commissioners first meeting in December, I presented the idea of possibly using the armory building for the display in addition to funds in support of

the project. At this point the number of photos was growing, with numbers close to 300! The word was getting out.

Remembering veterans that had passed, I reached out (and continue to reach out) to remaining family members asking for photos and stories, if available, of their veteran. The number of photos continued to grow, and an employee of Shields Hardware was dedicated to ensuring photos were displayed.

On 29 February 2024 I learned the sad news that Jim had passed away. It was hard losing a close friend and his dedication to recognizing local veterans. Even after his passing, photos continued to be received. Photos were being dropped off at Shields right up to their official closing date of 29 June 2024.

As of this time, there are over 340 photos of veterans in the collection. The photos have been taken down, boxed up and currently stored in an environmentally secure area. The Veterans Hall of Honor board of directors meet on a monthly basis to discuss funding status and possible location for display. I have conducted interviews with both WTHI, channel 10, and WTWO, channel 2, describing the display and seeking additional photos and funds to support the project.

We are continuing to add to the photo collection with the confidence we will soon have an appropriate location identified. One idea for fundraising is a golf scramble to be held at the Phil Harris Golf Course on Fri, 12 July. Although an ambitious goal, we have the hope that a place will be identified, photos displayed and open for visitors on 11 November 2024, Veterans Day.

Any veteran (anyone who has worn a uniform of the armed services) whether living or not, should submit a photo or have one submitted. As mentioned earlier, any size photo can be presented to Lamar Imaging, next to the VFW, and deliver the 8"x10" photo to the mayor's office at city hall. Digital photos can be emailed to veteranphotos23@gmail.com. Please include Name of Veteran, Branch of Service, Dates of service (if known) and hometown. Include VETERAN in the subject line. Private donations can be mailed to John Preble, 1723 Dogwood Ln, Linton, IN 47441. If there are any questions, please forward them to the above-mentioned email.

I hope and pray everyone has a safe and enjoyable 4th of July. A time when Linton is at it's finest!