

30 Long Island WWII Vets Visit 'Their' Memorial

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WASHINGTON — About 30 aging veterans from New York's Long Island visited their World War II Memorial in the Nation's Capitol on June 28, thanks mostly to the ongoing fundraising efforts of VFW Post 7009 in Southampton, and to a vision born four years ago by an Air Force retiree who wanted to make a difference.

The Long Island program falls under the auspices of Honor Flight, a nonprofit organization founded in Ohio in 2004 for the sole purpose of transporting World War II veterans to see their memorial for free. Through its 69 hubs in 30 states, Honor Flight has now provided roundtrip transportation to more than 9,000 WWII veterans. The organization's 2008 goal is to transport 12,000 veterans to Washington.

Honor Flight founder Earl Morse, who is a member of VFW Post 1031 in Springfield, Ohio, said that for many veterans, now well into their 80s and some in their 90s, Honor Flight is perhaps their last opportunity to visit the national memorial that was dedicated to the service and sacrifice of the 16 million Americans who wore the uniform. Their numbers have now shrunk to less than 2.5 million, but their desire to visit their memorial has not diminished.

Included on the Long Island Honor Flight trip were VFW members Bruno Lijoi, 90, of Farmingdale; Matt O'Reilly, 85, of Centereach; John D'Amico, 86, of New Hyde Park; and Frank Suszczynski, 82, of Commack. All were proud yet humbled by the visit, and they hope others will also be able to visit their national memorial.

According to VFW Post 7009 commander Bob Grisnik, approximately \$25,000 has been raised to send two Honor Flights to Washington already this year, with a third planned for the fall. Approximately 6,000 WWII veterans are currently on Honor Flight's nationwide waiting list. To make a tax-deductable donation, go to the Honor Flight website at www.honorflight.org.

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