

# DAV members, community capture its history

Members from DAV Chapter 86 in Palm Coast, Fla., were done watching integral parts of their local history fade away without capturing their local veterans stories in a way that would last throughout time.

“All the World War I guys are gone now; those stories are lost forever,” said Larry Rekart, who serves as the chapter treasurer. “How many more stories are there that need told?”

Rekart isn't the first person to ask that question. As it lies at the heart of the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project, which preserves the recollections of American wartime veterans, there are differences between the two initiatives. For example, the Flagler County project is not limited to wartime and organizers want to also record what happened to the veterans after their service – how they made use of their G.I. Bill, their experiences with the Veterans Administration and their reception they received upon returning to the states.

The origins of the local initiative date back to Veterans Day 2015 when WWII veteran Dr. Robert Stanton spoke at the Flagler Beach observance, and Rekart wanted to record his speech.

“There was some sort of technical glitch that prevented us from recording his speech,” said Rekart. “We never had another opportunity, as unfortunately, Dr. Stanton passed away in January.”

Local DAV members quickly saw the value in getting these stories told and recorded on video. But it's no small task, as officially there are more than 13,000 veterans living in the county, and there was a drawback – none of the members had experience with the needed technology. Then, someone said “Our

grandkids could probably do that.”

So Rekart sought out members of a generation more in tune with today’s technology – he went to Matanzas High School. The school’s junior ROTC program had presented the colors at the same Veterans Day observance where Stanton spoke and where more than willing to assist.

Interested cadets are conducting the interviews while television production students capture them on video. The interviews conducted will be sent to the Library of Congress and the Veterans History Project, as well as stored in the local historical society and the Flagler County Library.

Tyler Villines, a cadet captain with Matanzas JROTC who has long wanted to join the military was immediately drawn to the project.

“I’m learning more about what veterans did for our country and their service,” he said, calling the project a “good experience.”

“It’s a powerful and important mission they are on,” said DAV National Membership Director Doug Wells. “It’s imperative we capture these stories and a part of our nation’s history while we can. It’s also a great way for the local chapter to be active in their communities and even locate more veterans throughout the process.”

In mid April, the group gathered for a trial run and they sat down with World War II Army veteran Charles Valorose who offers an increasingly rare and personal glimpse of history. While the accounts of wartime generals and policy-makers are well documented, the same cannot be said about most veterans whose experiences can contribute to the public’s understanding of the military experience – not to mention providing insight into different perspectives of those who served.

The long project had officially begun.

“This is the most impactful project they have worked on,” said Tracey Hicks, Career Technical Educator at Matanzas High School. They are learning a lot and have come to appreciate the value of what the veterans have done for this country. I am proud that myself and my students are working on this very important project and that the message will be documented for the public to see.”

David Martin, a Matanzas High School senior, who operated one of the cameras, pointed out the value in meeting these veterans and learning from them.

“I think it makes you reflect a lot more on things you do,” he said. “It makes you take a second to look and say, ‘these people fought for our freedoms, and I’m not going to squander any opportunities.’”

DAV Chapter 86 set a lofty goal, in which meeting their objective will require time and people willing to see it through, however, if successful, Rekart hopes other counties will want to do their own.