



Grand Island Students Accompany Local Vets to Washington D.C.

Honor Flight Buffalo Flies Veterans to Visit Memorials in Honor of Their Service

Each year, Honor Flight Buffalo flies local veterans at no charge to Washington D.C. to visit those memorials dedicated to honor their sacrifices. On May 21, 2011, Grand Island High School students Daniel Conrad and Michael Giambra will also board the flight serving as the first student guardians ever to accompany veterans from western New York.

Grand Island High School is the first school to partner with Honor Flight Buffalo. Under the leadership of Kristine Bajdas, senior library clerk, the Friends of Rachel Character Council (FORCC) began fundraising for Honor Flight Buffalo in April 2010. "Our students and staff have truly embraced the opportunity to thank those who have served our country," states Sandra Anzalone, principal at Grand Island High School. "The generosity our students and staff demonstrate as they continue to raise funds for Honor Flight Buffalo is a shining example of their commitment to honor our local veterans." To date, Grand Island High School has raised enough funds to sponsor a visit to Washington D.C. for four local veterans.

Honor Flight Buffalo announced an anonymous donor had offered to fund a trip for two local students and Grand Island was selected to participate, in part, due to previous successful fundraising efforts from their students and staff. During a 2010 Veteran's Day assembly organized by Bajdas and the FORCC, faculty members presented Honor Flight Buffalo with a \$300 check; this was in addition to \$600 in student donations last spring and \$300 donated from efforts conducted at Veronica Connor Middle School. In attendance that day, honoree Norman Hameister shared his experience as one of the Navy Seabees in World War II with the students. Hameister was one of the veterans to go to Washington's World War II Monument in September thanks to Honor Flight Buffalo and the support of Grand Island students and staff. "The students were captivated by Mr. Hameister's story and the opportunity to hear a war veteran speak was a great experience for our kids. It has inspired our students to continue their efforts in sending more veterans on future trips," said Jerry Parisi, Grand Island High School assistant principal.

As a result of the assembly, sophomores Conrad and Giambra were selected to escort western New York veterans on the May 21st flight. "The veterans deserve to be recognized for all they have done for our country. It's kind of cool that I get to show them these monuments and share in that experience with them" says Giambra, son of Theresa and Michael Giambra. My grandfather (David Russell) was in the military, he served in Europe for five years. He was excited to hear I am attending and feels it will be a great opportunity for me. He brought me a stack of books and DVD's documenting the wars to help me prepare for the trip."

Conrad, son of Laura and Scott Emery, also spoke of his grandfathers' (George Conrad and Alan Emery) military experience. "My grandfather used to tell me about the Army. He had lots of things to show me like swords, knives, a Nazi flag and money." Conrad states that after graduation he is considering a career in the U.S. Army with the hopes of joining a Special Forces unit.

Conrad and Giambra attended a guardian training at Honor Flight Buffalo's Meet and Greet on Saturday, May 14, 2011. The students received proper instructions on how to serve as a guardian and had the opportunity to meet the veterans they will be traveling with on May 21, 2011. The itinerary for the journey to Washington D.C. includes a visit to the World War II Memorial, Korean Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, a brief tour of Washington, DC, Arlington National Cemetery and Changing of the Guard, and Iwo Jima before returning to a "Welcome Home Celebration" at the Buffalo Niagara International Airport.

To welcome these heroes home, a bus load of Grand Island students and family members will be waiting with flags and banners at the Buffalo airport. The flight is expected to arrive at 7:25 p.m. and all are welcome to attend the celebration. Honor Flight Buffalo volunteers will be at the airport directing the celebration and attendees are encouraged to bring banners and signs of appreciation. Grand Island students will present Honor Flight Buffalo with a check totaling their most recent fundraising efforts.

As Memorial Day approaches, Grand Island Schools would like to remind everyone to honor all those who have fallen in defense of our great nation and to take the time to thank those who have served our country. If you are interested in donating to the efforts of Honor Flight Buffalo on behalf of Grand Island High School, please visit the Web site at www.honorflightbuffalo.org.