

Museum preserves priceless veterans' stories

WWII soldier had long journey from Polish Army to Goodland

The death of Florence Green earlier this year was a significant moment for the world. Mrs. Green, who would have turned 111 on Feb. 19, was the last surviving World War I veteran. While marking the end of a generation forever, the focus is now on survivors and veterans of World War II and the Holocaust.

According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 850 World War II veterans die per day. That sobering statistic marks how quickly the "greatest generation" is disappearing. That number hit locally this year with several veterans passing away. One of those distinguished veterans, Stanley Wolak passed away on February 21, 2012.

The High Plains Museum staff is saddened to hear of his passing, and of the loss of that quickly disappearing generation. In an effort to preserve that history,

the High Plains Museum embarked on an oral history project last summer to record the remarkable stories of those Sherman County residents that served in global conflicts.



S. Wolak

Ren Scherling, the project manager, carried out research and interviewed a select few, Stanley being the first.

Stanley joined the Polish Army prior to the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. By the time war broke out, he obtained the rank of corporal. A quick defeat of Poland saw Stanley turn to active hiding from the invading German Army until one cold morning on February 2, 1940, when he was captured.

"The man knocked down the door and gave [me] five minutes [to get ready to move out ... with] about five foot of snow on the ground and about 20 below zero," he said.

Stanley was then moved out to a train station where he and fellow prisoners were

loaded into freight cars bound for Germany. Once in Germany he was taken to Stuttgart, the SS headquarters, and was sent to a sub-camp of Buchenwald. Here Stanley crushed rocks for four and a half years.

Conditions were rough in the camp. "You had to work every day," he said. "They give you a meal once a day."

Hard labor, meager meals, and 7 a.m. roll calls made for a harsh existence. No information reached the prisoners and they were only told what they heard from Hitler on the radio.

"Every month, once a month... you had a halfway decent meal when Hitler was talking on the radio," he said. "You had to listen to him. That's the only time you had halfway decent meals. And when Hitler was talking, that's the only thing you knew."

The prisoners had no idea what was going on with the War; they didn't know that the Soviets were pushing west and that the Allies were pushing east.

In September, 1945, French forces came and liberated the camp. A French officer who knew Polish conversed with Stanley.

"He said, 'what you want to do now, you want to go with us or you stay here?'" Stanley remembered. "I didn't have nothing to lose so I went with the French division."

Stanley joined the French Army and fought with them as they moved toward Berlin. After serving eight months in the French Army, Stanley switched to the American Army where he was stationed as a guard at Nuremberg. He guarded prisoners that included Hitler's driver and nurse. He also stood guard to other prisoners watching the prisoners transfer from their work station to the prison. Stanley stayed in Germany until his relocation to the States; he never returned to Poland as it was still too dangerous for men who served in the Polish Army to return.

In 1947 Stanley met and married his wife, Janie, in Ludwigsburg, Germany, and entered an application to come to the United States. A Catholic priest came with applications to sign for possible admittance to the United States and Stanley and Janie signed up. They were accepted and after being checked by most government agencies, traveled from Germany to New York in 1949. From there they moved to Goodland, Kansas, sponsored by Walter Taylor. Stanley farmed and then worked for the City of Goodland for thirty-one years before retiring.

This Memorial Day, the High Plains Museum would like to thank all veterans,

but we are especially thankful to the men who participated in our oral history project and shared their story. They are remarkable treasures for the High Plains Museum. The oral histories collected - Stanley Wolak, Harold VanVleet, Kay Melia, Leonard Kashka, Dale Stephens, and Alvin McCall's children - account for stark experiences of locals who served in global conflict. Those accounts serve as important touchstones for relating those world events to us locally. Capturing those oral histories was a great triumph for the High Plains Museum and for posterity.

As stewards of history and in the need for preservation of the perspective and experiences of different generations, we would urge you to record your own oral histories with your family. It need not be elaborate; we simply documented our conversations with a digital recorder and transcribed the interview. The time to record those experiences is now. The oral histories collected by the High Plains Museum will be made available online as well as at the Museum. We would like to encourage you to visit and listen to their remarkable story and gain some perspective about our local involvement in global affairs.

-The High Plains Museum



Part of the kindergarten boomwackers during their songs at the kindergarten music program held recently at the Goodland High School auditorium. Boomwackers are plastic tubes that are tuned

to certain notes so that songs can be played with them.

Photo by Pat Schiefen/The Goodland Star-News

Kindergarteners show off talent

By Pat Schiefen
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The kindergarten students from West Elementary School put on their end-of-the-year music program Thursday night, May 17, at the Goodland High School auditorium.

They did a good job of remembering the words and the music for songs that were inspired by Mother Goose. The kindergarten boomwackers started off the program with three numbers including "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "London Bridge" and "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Boomwackers are hollow tubes of different lengths that correspond to notes. The kids also sang while they played the boomwackers.

Those in Karen Stone's class playing the boomwackers were Venesa Ayers, August Sains, Logan Fritz and Ellie Goodwin. Those from Susan McCall's class were Grace Anderson, Jaron Northdurft, Bryne Purvis and Beau Warden. The last group from Denise White's class were Haley Biermann, Braden Bergsma, Cole Linton, Jaxi Mitchek and Witton Peter.

The program went on to sing about Humpty Dumpty; Little Boy Blue; Itsy Bitsy Spider; Mary, Mary Quite Contrary and other nursery rhyme favorites.

Linda Lucas is the music instructor and Verna Milnes is the principal of West Elementary.

tor and Verna Milnes is the principal of West Elementary.

The rest of the students from McCall's class in the program were Aubrey Aaron, Hannah Coumerilh, Kylie DeHoyos, Samuel Isham, Kerreck Lockhart, Chase Longrear, Elaina Mason, Joshua Miner, Klari-ssa Nichols, Lisette Pulido, Mary Purcella, Zion Quinlan, Allison Rager, Havon Rickard, Angelica Sanchez, Brayden Smith, Sean Thompson and Noah Tremblay.

The remainder of Stone's class in the program were Avery Aguilar, Brent Belshe, Brayden Dominguez, Kaden Dorn, Domonic Gamboa, Mia Hernandez, Aspen Knapp, Lexus Lasley, Aiden Miller, Sophia Nichols, Isabelle O'Brien, Aaron Owens, Jasmyne Raines, Lupe Ramirez, Grace Riedesel, Carolyn Riley, Briella Rubio, Alvaro Soto, Abraham Villarreal, Lily Walker and Tyler Weber.

The rest of the students from White's class were Audrey Blake, Zachary Clayville, Evanie Conde, Serena Craig, Lesly Dominguez, Sofia Garza, Anahi Hernandez, Jacelyn Horinek, Oscar Lopez, Idania Mendoza, Lilly Porter, L.J. Purvis, Jazmon Rickard, Adamris Romero, Natalie Salmans, Alice Scholl, Noah Shinette, Jaylon Thomas and Nat Vasquez.

Highway Patrol starts seatbelt enforcement

Jaelyn O'Neill of Lenexa survived a traffic crash earlier this month and learned firsthand a lesson that Kansas law enforcement officers will start teaching this week: Buckle your seatbelt.

"The combination of the air bag and seatbelt protected me perfectly," said O'Neill, a 29-year-old pharmaceutical sales representative. "They did an amazing job. I will always wear my seatbelt for sure now."

Kansas law enforcement officers today commence the annual statewide "Click it. Or ticket." program. Highway Patrol troopers, sheriff's deputies and police officers statewide will be working overtime now through the Memorial Day weekend specifically to make sure people are buckled up.

"It costs nothing to wear a seatbelt," said Capt. Rusty Leeds, commander of the Wichita Police Department's Patrol West Bureau, at a May 10 news conference. "But it has the potential to save your life or prevent serious, debilitating injuries."

Kansas is one of 32 states, plus the District of Columbia, whose laws allow a vehicle to be stopped solely because occupants are not properly restrained. Leeds added that Kansas officers will be enforcing seatbelt laws at night, since Kansas exceeds national statistics for deaths of unrestrained riders in darkness.

Nationwide in 2010, the latest year for which data is available, 61 percent of the 10,647 passenger vehicle occupants who died in motor vehicle traffic crashes during primarily nighttime hour were not wearing seat belts at the time of the fatal crash. In primarily daylight hours, the rate is 42 percent.

In Kansas by comparison, 76 percent of the 154 passenger vehicle occupants who died in traffic crashes between 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. were not wearing their seatbelts at the time of the fatal crash, compared with 57 percent during the daytime hours.

O'Neill, a pharmaceutical sales representative, avoided becoming a fatality statistic when she was properly restrained while driv-

ing northbound in Lenexa, Kan., on Quivira Road near 94th Street the afternoon of May 8. A driver pulled out of a parking lot to turn left, and O'Neill's vehicle smacked right into the other car, triggering O'Neill's airbags and tightening her seatbelt.

"It happened very quickly," O'Neill recalled. "The entire car shook. All the air bags came out. My cell phone flew out of my cupholder, and even out of its case. It was a big hit, and the car shook a lot."

O'Neill was transported to an emergency room, but she had no fractures and only minor bruises and scrapes, she said.

"The airbag and the seatbelt did a good job," she said. "They protected me perfectly."

She added that her father, John O'Neill of Lenexa, typically didn't wear a seatbelt because of discomfort. "But after seeing photos of my car after my crash, he told me he will be wearing a seatbelt from now on," O'Neill said.

NASA astrophysicist at library Wednesday

Astrophysicist Kevin Manning, a former consultant with NASA will give a presentation for families at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at the Goodland Public Library, 812 Broadway on Astronomy for Everyone. His is passionate about astronomy and will share his excitement with the audience.

Following an indoor program including video footage and hands-on activities. People will learn about the size and scale of the universe, the stars and other celestial wonders. If there are relatively clear skies everyone will then go outside to

look at celestial objects in the night sky, such as the rings of Saturn and craters on the moon.

corrections

The Goodland Star-News will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual. We want to keep an accurate record and appreciate you calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

RETIREMENT RECEPTION

USD 352 would like to invite the public to attend a Retirement Reception on **Friday, May 25, 2012 from 3-5 p.m.** at the Administration Building, 1312 Main, Goodland. Those being honored are Janet Davis, Mary Kratky, and Maggie Hernandez.

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On Vacation

Back to buying again on June 11, 2012