

News from the Front Lines

VETERANS HONOR FLIGHT OF ND/MN

May 2025

A Grand Time Had by All!

Grand Forks International Airport was all decked out, supporters were lined up and ready, the air had a slight crispness to it while the morning sun was starting to peek out ... it was time to send 229 heroes off to Washington, DC in style!



Ben Ramse of McIntosh, a former sailor himself, explores the National Museum of the US Navy

For three days, Veterans from the upper-most areas of our hub enjoyed two nights and three days visiting

the memorials and monuments built in their honor. From the National Archives to Fort McHenry to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and everything in between, we saw and did a lot!

The weather couldn't have been more beautiful and the city really showed off with her fresh spring flowers and refreshing daily temps.

Local members of the media who joined us highlighted the stories of several travelers, shining a light on the brave men and women who gave so much for all of us.

Veterans were treated

to gourmet dinners, live music (and in one case, even a singing bus driver!), volunteer and medical assistance at every turn, and grateful hearts each step of the way.

Upon arriving home, GFK once again showed out, with over 1,000 well-wishers decked out with balloons and posters, and a live band playing patriotic music welcoming their heroes back home.



Veterans Andy Staudt and Chris Dunshee, both of Bemidji, enjoying the FDR Memorial

It was truly another trip for the record books, one we are so very proud to have played a part in.

With a quick turnaround, we're looking forward to taking wing again the first weekend in May out of Hector International Airport in Fargo and are excited to share more about that trip later this summer!

Special points of interest:

- VETERANS HONOR FLIGHT OF ND/MN WAS FOUNDED IN 2015
- SINCE ITS CREATION, APPROXIMATELY 2,619 VETERANS OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY AREA HAVE BEEN FLOWN TO WASHINGTON, DC
- HONOR FLIGHTS ARE ALWAYS EXPENSE-FREE FOR OUR VETERANS



Get to Know One of Our Flight Veterans



Gary Guggenberger of Bemidji, MN served in the US Army's 352nd Transportation Co.

Oftentimes, when Gary Guggenberger, US Army Veteran, is asked to speak in front of groups of young adults and teenagers, he'll start off his presentations with a statement that grabs their attention and makes them sit up a little straighter — any good orator's goal for holding their audience. Gary's opening line carries a lot

more weight, however.

He asks them to think about the first day of their freshman year ... and then about the last day of their senior year. He tells them that in roughly that same amount of time, he was chained to a tree in the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia. (cont'd on next page)

Inside this issue:

MEET A VOLUNTEER	3
THIEF RIVER FALLS COMMUNITY RALLIES FOR HONOR FLIGHT	3
KNOW BEFORE YOU GO	4
SUMMER BLAST IS A BLAST!	4
REAL IDS REQUIRED MAY 2025	4
HOW YOU CAN HELP	5
INSIDER TRIP SECRETS	5
JOIN US AT FUTURE EVENTS	6

Get to Know One of Our Flight Veterans — continued from page 1

(cont'd from page 1) After being ambushed and badly injured while on a transport run in Vietnam, Gary was taken prisoner.

Unlike many of the other POWs during the Vietnam War, he was not taken to the well-known "Hanoi Hilton"

prison. Rather, the entirety of his captivity was

spent moving from one jungle post to the next, always either chained to a tree or enclosed in a small outdoor cage made of logs. On several occasions he was the only prisoner at the post, sometimes there were small

case even caring for a stray baby chicken. Ultimately, Gary earned his release four years and one month later with



Gary is pictured second from left, back row, with other American prisoners at their release in February 1973

the signing of the Paris Peace Accords. As he was readied for his return to the Americans, the very Vietnamese soldier that had tried to end his life before tak-

ing him prisoner was present at his release. He shook Gary's hand, telling him, "Now, go home and be a better man" before turning him over. Stunned by the Vietnamese soldier's comment, Gary was determined to overcome this whole experience.

After being stabilized in the Philippines, rehabbing and debriefing stateside, a hero's reception trip to Washington, and a bit more time on

active duty, Gary was honorably discharged from the Army. It was then he sought a quieter lifestyle, becoming a fishery technician for the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

For nearly 30 years he quietly worked alongside countless individuals that knew nothing of his traumatic past. It was only after moving back to Minnesota and retiring to the lake home he had once dreamed about that he began sharing his story with others.

At the encouragement of fellow Veterans, Gary has continued to serve others, including those he was held captive with, by discussing his experiences and working through his healing to get to where he is today.

It would be easy for him to be bitter, angry, frustrated ... all of the emotions one would expect. However, that's not the person Gary is. He recognizes that many of the guards watching over him were just doing their job ... just like he had been doing that fateful day in January 1969. And while he hasn't become best friends with any of them, he harbors no ill will toward them either. Instead, he is humble, kind, gentle, and lives his life with intention.

A few years ago, several of the Vietnam Veterans from Bemidji that Gary is friends with decided to apply to go on an Honor Flight. When their numbers came up, they were encouraged to know they'd all been selected for the same trip. As they toured Washington, DC, each one found different parts of the trip meaningful. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, of course, struck a chord with all of them.

What really made the most impact on Gary however, was viewing the old, faded copy of the United States' Constitution. He explained that "For the four years I was held captive, I had little to no freedoms whatsoever.



Gary, a Vietnam War Veteran, is pictured by The Three Soldiers statue at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

er. Now, I'm viewing the document that gives all Americans the liberty to live their lives the way they best see fit and it really drove home just how much was taken away from me." He goes on to say, "Taking an Honor

Flight was amazing. Seeing all of the Veterans on this trip who would have otherwise not been able to travel to DC was incredible. Viewing the memorials that represent what our nation has asked of its young men and women in order to protect our way of life and that of our allies was unbelievable. This was a trip I am so glad to have taken."

It was truly we at Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN that were the fortunate ones to serve and to fly you, Gary. It really was OUR honor to be part of your story. Thank you for allowing us to be a page in your life's book.



Viewing the Constitution of the USA was a true highlight for Gary while on his Honor Flight

"SEEING ALL OF THE VETERANS ON THIS TRIP WHO WOULD HAVE OTHERWISE NOT BEEN ABLE TO TRAVEL TO DC WAS INCREDIBLE."

- GARY GUGGENBERGER

groups. After a bit, it was clear to Gary he was being used for propaganda purposes and for political positioning by his captors. Additionally, he knew he was likely going to survive his captivity if he could hang tough.

His days were spent navigating the psychological torment and labor of imprisonment, dreaming of one day living on a lake, trying to stay healthy, communicating what little he could with the other prisoners, and in one

Meet a Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN Volunteer

One of the original Honor Flight volunteers in the Red River Valley, Tod Ganje champions the travel aspects of every flight out of our hub.

In 2007, Tod was asked to aid in the flight and hotel booking process. Since then, he's coordinated the travel plans for nearly 3,000 of our community's heroes.

A Minnesota State University, Moorhead graduate, Tod has worked in the travel industry for decades with Travel Incorporated in Moorhead. In addition to the 20 Honor Flights he's worked on, he's also hosted numerous Bison fans on chartered trips to Frisco, Texas. He specializes in coordinating travel logistics for athletic teams, and corporate, student,

and church groups. His attention to detail mixed with a focus on safety and security while keeping costs competitive for his clients have led to a winning combination over the years.

As a non-military civilian, he respects and thanks those who have served our great nation. Putting his experience and talents to use for the Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN Board of Directors is his way to give back to those that gave of themselves. He says, "Through my years as part of this organization my respect continues to grow. I want all our Veterans to know how much they are appreciated. I'd also like to thank everyone who supports our organization. I see it time and time

again, how grateful the Veterans are for the opportunity to experience an Honor Flight. We really have something special in this community."

We couldn't agree more! The contributions Tod has made to our group for nearly 20 years have been invaluable.

It likely comes as no surprise that Tod and his

wife, Audrey, have enjoyed making travel an important part of their relationship, having enjoyed vacations all over our country and the world!



*Tod Ganje
Director*

"I LOVE WATCHING OUR VETERANS BE TREATED LIKE SUPERSTARS ON THEIR HONOR FLIGHTS — BECAUSE THEY ARE!"

-TOD GANJE, DIRECTOR

Thief River Falls Community Rallies for Honor Flight

For the second year in a row, the Thief River Falls community has really showed out for Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN!

Serving as the driving force behind this all-hands-on-deck style fundraiser, Roger Reitmeier, Sons of the American Legion member, and Wendy Mattson, Manager of American Legion Post 117, had been brainstorming for years how they could make the biggest impact to send more of their community's heroes on their Honor Flights. A little over two years ago, the wheels were put in motion for a large-scale fundraiser event.

Roger, a true BBQ pitmaster, knew he wanted to cook a delicious meal for the day's event and Wendy had just the place and access to the best



One of the many beautiful items up for bid

team for such a meal. Several of the area's flight Veterans donated items for both the silent and live auction, and their families and friends all pitched in securing donations from their various networks.

On Sunday, April 27, folks gathered at the Legion for a pulled pork lunch with all the fixings, silent auction, live auction, cash raffle, and tip board meat raffle. Many flight Veterans were in attend-

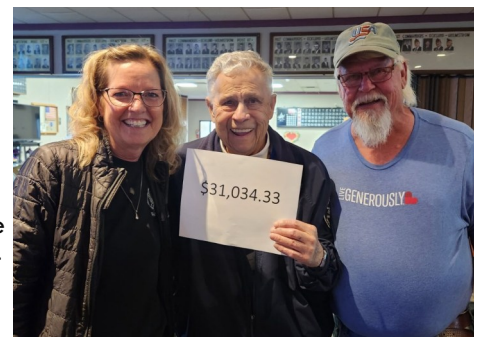
ance, including those who had just returned home from their Honor Flight a mere five days prior. The place was packed to the gills with enthusiasm!

Wendy said, "We are grateful for the support and help of so

many that participated in our fundraiser. It truly was a big team effort. We know how important it is to get as many Veterans as possible on these trips. We're incredibly proud of our community's combined effort to fund 19+ heroes' trips this year!"

We couldn't agree more! With a total raised of over \$31,000, we at Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN are thrilled!

The Thief River Falls crew is already looking ahead to next year's event and hoping for a similar (or bigger!) turnout from the community.



Wendy, Don Roberts, Grand Forks Community Ambassador, and Roger celebrate the total raised from their incredible event

Know Before You Go — Make Your Bag Stand Out

Each of our flight Veterans receives a color-coded duffle bag (courtesy of American Legion Post 21 in Moorhead, MN) to use as their luggage on our trip. Using the issued bags ensures we have room in the cargo hold of our planes for essential supplies like wheelchairs, weather gear, and so on ... and to which bus each bag belongs on.

There's only one problem: when the entirety of a bus's duffle bags is stacked for re-distributing to their rightful owners, it can be impossible to tell them apart.

We recommend adding a brightly colored luggage tag or ribbon to your bag ... something that will help it stand out from the others. It's also advised to

include your name inside the bag should the tag fall off.

While you're at it, do the same for your CPAP if you'll be bringing one. The majority of the CPAPs we transport are issued by the VA and as such, all have the same carrying bag.

Nothing kills the buzz of a great travel day like trying to find your correct luggage.



Give your luggage visibility by adding a unique tag or ribbon

Summer Blast is a Blast!

We are once again looking forward to spending the weekend with so many of our raving fans at Summer Blast at the friendly American Legion in Moorhead, MN!

There will be fun for all ages throughout the weekend during the daytime events. A bouncy house for the kiddos ... silent auction, bake sale, raffles, a vendor fair, and more for the adults ... meal deals and food trucks for everyone throughout the day ... live media broadcasts from the event ... there's truly something for everyone!

Four incredible bands have



Let the kids jump their energy out on a bouncy house similar to last year's version

been booked to close out each night's events. Friday evening features two groups for the rock 'n rollers when we party to Tripwire and an REO Speedwagon tribute band, while Saturday night brings out the country in everyone with tributes to both Alabama and Toby Keith — yee-haw! No matter your style of music, both evenings always bring

the house down.

There are currently over 750 Veterans in our hub waiting to make their Honor Flight. We are committed to making that trip of a lifetime happen for them. Events like Summer Blast help us do just that. The support we've received from the communities in our hub has been incredible — we love seeing you at our events and

fundraisers.

Make plans now to attend our biggest summer fundraising event at American Legion Post 21 in Moorhead, MN July 25-26, 2025. We can't wait to have a blast with all of you!



Rock out to Tripwire, one of four bands hired to end each night with a bang!

Real IDs required for May 2025 Honor Flights and beyond

Anyone who wishes to travel via commercial or chartered airline beginning May 7, 2025 will need to possess a Real ID.

Real IDs can be obtained at your local Driver and Vehicle Services in Minnesota and Driver License offices in North Dakota. You will be required to bring several documents to your appointment to obtain your Real ID. Be sure to refer-

ence the website listed here to determine what information you will need to gather beforehand.

Not sure if you already have a Real ID? Check



to

see if there is a star on your ID card. If there's NOT a star, your card won't be valid for air travel later this spring.

We cannot stress enough how important it is to apply for your Real ID now. The process can take some time and we never know what could potentially impact the processing turnaround time.

If you have any questions about Real IDs, including what other forms of ID could potentially be used in place of a Real ID, please visit the website below or contact Tod Ganje, Director, at 218.236.8383 or Lori Ishaug, Vice President, at 701.361.6972.

[HTTPS://WWW.DHS.GOV/REAL-ID](https://www.dhs.gov/real-id)

How You Can Help — Share Your Talents, Start Where You Are



One of the many beautiful handmade quilts Sandi has donated

We are constantly amazed by the variety of talents and expertise our raving fans have — you are all just amazing! From baking to cooking ... from woodwork to metal work ... and everything in between, we have been the beneficiaries of so many of your beautiful, heartfelt items that have turned into monetary donations through silent auctions, raffles, and more.

A while back, Sandi Brantl wanted to contribute to the efforts of getting community heroes out to Washington,

DC. She thought some money might be able to be raised if she donated one of her quilts to her friend and one of our volunteers, Delanie Hirschmann.

Delanie and her parents, Grand Forks Community Ambassadors Don and Betty Roberts, gratefully accepted one of her beautiful works and decided to raffle it off. For \$10, folks could purchase a ticket in an attempt to win it.

The raffle was a hit! So much so, that Sandi and the Roberts family moved forward with raffling off another ten quilts over the years! Sandi's quilts have ended up in homes all over the Upper Midwest. Winners are always THRILLED to get their hands on their very own beautiful quilt.

Sandi says, "I had so many quilts made up and knew I

wanted them to end up in the most special hands. Donating my handmade quilts to Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN was a natural fit, coming from a military family myself, and knowing they could help raise funds for Veterans' trips."



Sandi's work is loved by so many

The Roberts family members are huge fans of Sandi and her work. In addition to being a wonderful person, over \$5,800 (just shy of four Veterans' fully-funded trips) has been raised through the raffles of her quilts.

Sandi certainly wasn't looking for notoriety when she offered to help. She simply wanted to do right by the people who sacrificed so much for the betterment of our country. And she did so by sharing her talent. She didn't overthink it or get in over her head. She did what she could with what she had.

If there is something you excel

at and would like to share your talents, too ... but maybe you're not exactly sure how to do just that or would like some help getting your idea(s) off the ground, our committed volunteer team is ready to help.

Vice President Lori Ishaug, who also serves as our volunteer coordinator, would love to talk more with you. She can walk you through whether your idea would drive fundraising through a silent auction, as a separate event, or otherwise. Lori can be reached at 701.631.6972.



For years, Sandi has loved quilting and she's mighty good at it, too! We're fortunate she's shared her talents with us!

Insider Trip Secrets — Leave the Inclement Weather Preparedness to Us

While we make every effort to fly our heroes out to Washington, DC during the most favorable weather seasons, when Mother Nature makes up her mind ... she always wins.

Not to toot our own horn, but we've gotten real good at preparing for less than ideal weather conditions.

On each flight, we pack hundreds of rain ponchos should

the skies open up, warm blankets in case of a cold snap, sunscreen to prevent against the harmful effects of a cloudless sky, tons of bottled water to keep everyone hydrated during



A little rain isn't going to stop us! We'll be ready to keep you dry if need be.

a heat wave ... we even pack extra clothes should a mud puddle try to ruin someone's day. <ok, fine ... toot toot!>

Knowing this, feel free to

pack a little lighter for your trip, since we'll have the bulkier things covered. Of course, we'd like you to pack the coat and ballcap we issue at your Preflight Meeting.

Leave the rain coats and winter-weight clothes at home ... we've got you covered.

And hey, now you've got room in your bag for that souvenir you're hoping to find!



The Real ID
deadline is coming up!
Make sure you have
yours before May 7,
2025!

[HTTPS://WWW.DHS.GOV/REAL-ID](https://www.dhs.gov/real-id)

VETERANS HONOR FLIGHT OF ND/MN

Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN
PO Box 644
West Fargo, ND 58078

Phone: 218-28-HONOR
E-mail: veteranshonorflightofndmn@gmail.com
Web: www.veteranshonorflightofndmn.org
Facebook: facebook.com/veteranshonorflightndmn

Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN is a non-profit organization created solely to honor America's Red River Valley Veterans for their sacrifice to our grateful nation. We are accepting applications from WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War Era Veterans. Applications can be found on our website. Flights occur in the spring and fall of each year, pending adequate fundraising.

We are a 100% volunteer, 501(c)(3) charity.

Join Us at Future Events!

Every Monday (no holidays) in 2025 — 5:30pm Meat Raffle at Speck's Bar in Fargo, ND

May 1 — 4:30pm Dinner-Auction-Bingo at the Legion Recreational Center in Halstad, MN

May 1 — 5:30-8:00pm Cruise Night at Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Moorhead, MN

May 3-4 — All Day Spirit of America Bike and Car Show at the Alerus Event Center in Grand Forks, ND

May 6 — 5:00pm Honor Flight Homecoming Celebration at the Fargodome in Fargo

May 7 — 5:30pm Meat Raffle at

Wild Rice Bar & Grill in Wild Rice, ND

May 9-10 — All Day Spring Flower Sale at American Legion Post 15 in Detroit Lakes, MN

May 10-11 — All Day Spring Flower Sale at Lake Country Meats in Alexandria, MN

May 17 — 2:00pm Team Up with Terry Golf Tournament at Birchwood Golf Course in Pelican Rapids, MN

May 21 — 5:30pm Meat Raffle at Wild Rice Bar & Grill in Wild Rice

June 7 — 4:00pm Chicken Dinner at Vets Club in Hillsboro, ND

June 14 — All Day Honoring Heroes on



Think you can handle 1,000 miles in 24 hours? Join the Iron Butt Ride and see the beauty the Roughrider State has to offer.

Wheels at several bars in Minnesota and ending at Twisted Sisters in Ada, MN

June 28 — 6:00am Iron Butt Ride at Travel Center of America in Fargo

July 2 — 4:30pm Pizza Night at Alexandria Community Woodfired in Alexandria

July 25-26 — All Day Summer Blast at American Legion Post 21 in Moorhead

July 27 — Time TBD Pancake Breakfast at Goodridge Lutheran Paris in Goodridge, MN

August 17 — 1:00pm F-M RedHawks Jersey Game at Newman Outdoor Field in Fargo

September 23 — 6:00pm Honor Flight Homecoming Celebration

at the Fargodome in Fargo

November 8 — 12:30pm Oh Deer! Purse Bingo at a location TBD in Fargo-Moorhead



Greet community heroes in person as they arrive home from Washington, DC



Check out the classic cars and hot rods at Cruise Night

Are you, a group you belong to, or your business interested in hosting a fundraising event? Visit our website to learn more!

VETERANSHONORFLIGHTOFNDMN.ORG/
THIRD-PARTY-APPLICATION