

LARSON ENCOURAGES VETS TO SHARE EXPERIENCES AS CCSU TAKES ON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman John B. Larson will join in honoring veterans Monday, November 21, at the dedication of Central Connecticut State University's partnership with the Veterans History Project. The dedication, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., includes a luncheon for veterans and families who have been interviewed by Central.

Larson, a graduate of Central, has been an active supporter of the Veterans History Project since its inception in 2000, arranging interviews with veterans and encouraging local schools to participate.

"I am proud and delighted at the active role that Central has taken in preserving our history and in recognizing the legacy of our veterans, as well as the contributions of those who supported the nation's war efforts at home," Larson said. "There is no substitute for comprehending the hardships and sacrifices suffered in war than hearing veterans first-hand memories told in their own voices. Encourage your family and friends to share their experiences. Each story is meaningful. Each memory adds to the collective insight into our past."

This fall, Central partnered with the U.S. Library of Congress's program through its Gov. William A. O'Neill Endowed Chair's Oral History Project, which is housed in its Center for Public Policy and Social Research. Central students, faculty and staff will conduct a videotaped interview of Connecticut veterans from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The tapes will be archived in the Special Collections at the university's Elihu Burritt Library. Copies of any other materials that veterans provide including journals, letters, service records, photographs, journals, field maps and drawings will be digitized and archived. Eventually, Central plans to make the interviews available on its website. So far Central has conducted 34 interviews.

Eileen Hurst, assistant director for the Center of Public Policy and Research, said Central's goal is to interview every veteran in the state. The disappearing numbers of World War II veterans, who are dying at a rate of 1,700 to 1,800 a day, have presented an urgency in capturing their stories. Eventually, the university also hopes to reach returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Across the country, only 15 veterans from the Iraq War have taken part in interviews, Hurst said. Often, for families, the interviews open up a part of their loved ones' lives that have been closed, even to them.

"There are never enough stories because everyone is an individual," said Hurst, who in 2003 began volunteering to interview veterans at the Veterans' Hospital in Rocky Hill. "It's history from the horse's mouth. Everyone's experience is different and how they view it is very different. They also talk about funny things that happen, everyday relationships and how it impacted their life and how they lived it. These stories are all phenomenal, and it's a personal honor to collect them."

The Veterans' History Project was established by legislation signed into law in 2000 to honor our nation's war veterans and those who supported them at home. Instituted by the U.S. Library of Congress, the project is building a lasting legacy of recorded memories, written memories and other documents chronicling veterans' and other citizens' wartime experiences, and how those experiences affected their lives and America itself.

"Since the Project began collecting personal stories, it has received almost 40,000 individual submissions and the number who participate increases each year," Larson said. "It has found that every person who takes part has felt that it was worthwhile. Some have been initially reluctant. They don't feel their story is that special or they're hesitant to revisit those memories. But once they sit down and begin talking, they find the experience freeing."

To learn more about Centrali's participation in the project, contact Hurst at (860) 832-2976.
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