



Purple Heart

MAGAZINE

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DIRECTOR AWARD



More Than Just a Parade

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT MOPH had received a once-in-a-lifetime invitation from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs to be featured on a beautiful and unique float in the 129th annual Pasadena Rose Parade, I had several immediate concerns, such as scheduling, who should attend and what the financial cost would be to the MOPH. The more I considered our order's participation, it became clear that, for MOPH, this was a moment in time that could not be passed up, and I was convinced that this would be an outstanding opportunity to promote *our* legacy. I realized that this would provide exposure for MOPH on one of the world's largest stages, with international television coverage to more than 70 million TV viewers, not to mention the almost one million parade watchers standing along the 5.5-mile route. These numbers would almost rival the Super Bowl for viewers.

The theme of the Rose Bowl Parade was "Making a Difference," and the Odd Fellows' float was titled "Sacrifice to Serve." I was accompanied by Commander Jim Anderson from the Department of California, and Patriot John Bircher, the National Public Relations Director and Historian. But, I also wanted to include one of our brothers or sisters who was a victim of all the many disasters this year and had suffered considerably. On the advice of the Department of Texas, we selected Patriot Sonya Broadway, who has lost her home twice to the hurricanes and floods. We were joined by three additional Purple Heart recipients, all members of the Odd Fellows: Robert Laizure, a 93-year-old U.S. Navy anti-aircraft gunner, who survived a kamikaze attack during WWII; Norman Summer, a USMC helicopter crew chief; and, Ronald Hanson, who served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam with the 1st Air Cavalry Division (we signed them all up for the MOPH).

Getting up at 3:30 a.m. to get to the staging areas on New Year's Day in the dark seemed unreal, but it allowed us to meet the Grand Marshall, Gary Sinise. When I introduced him to Robert Laizure, our WWII kamikaze survivor, Sinise (in typical "Lieutenant Dan, of *Forest Gump*" fashion), asked him if he had been to the WWII Museum in Louisiana?

When Robert said no Sinise said "Give me your name and I will make that happen for you, with all expenses paid." As we lined up for the parade, we discovered that we were in a prominent spot, directly behind the Grand Marshall, with the U.S. Marine Corps Marching Band leading the parade. We were advised to "smile constantly, look directly at the people along the route, and alternate using both arms to wave at the crowd," because "you're going to have sore arms by the end of the parade."

It is difficult to describe the sheer excitement and electrifying energy coming from the spectators in the bleachers lined along the parade route and, in some places, were as much as 40 to 50 rows high. The spectators on the streets and at intersections were 20 to 30 people deep. There were even viewers on the rooftops of buildings. It was a surreal experience, with the atmosphere of being in a football stadium, and the ecstasy of a home team scoring the winning touchdown. The spectators were joyfully yelling out, "Thank you," "Thanks," and "Thank you for your service." Some viewers were chanting, "USA, USA, USA, USA," and "God Bless the USA." Hundreds of thousands of women and children were throwing kisses, while thousands of veterans stood up and saluted us. Police officers, firefighters and



first responders, and other Americans from all walks of life, stood to show respect and their individual and collective appreciation to all Purple Heart recipients.

What I mean when I say it was a surreal experience is that, for me, it was not like I was there as the National Commander of MOPH. I felt like I was acting as the connection to the spectators for *you*, receiving their personal love, respect and appreciation on *your* behalf. Literally, as I tried to connect with the hundreds of thousands of faces by waving back, by saluting back, by even throwing kisses while saying "Thanks," "Thank you," "No, thank *you*," and chanting "USA" along with the crowd, I felt a personal connection for all Purple Heart recipients. It was a true welcome home! And, I especially felt it for the ones who paid the ultimate sacrifice by never returning home. I felt it for the WWII Greatest Generation, the Korean "Forgotten War" recipients, the Vietnam recipients who never got our homecoming, and for the GWOT recipients still in battle.

And then, all of a sudden, it was over. It didn't seem like it had taken three hours for the parade—it seemed

like half an hour. Our arms were not tired or sore—not on that day! I never actually saw the parade, but what I did see in the eyes of thousands of onlookers was an expression of love, admiration and respect. That is what I felt everywhere I went on your behalf and I am so thankful that we were able to contribute to the legacy of our order.

Finally, I wish to thank the entire Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs, and the more than 50 Rose Bowl volunteers for allowing us to join them during their days spent decorating the float in a tedious labor of love. I will never forget or live down that "fluffy guy" name. I especially send my love and thanks to John Miller, Roberta Prosk and JR Prosk. I am so proud and honored that you got the most coveted and prestigious Director's Trophy that you so rightly deserved. On behalf of the entire membership of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, we thank you for making this dream come true. Nor do I believe I will ever lose this euphoric feeling, for this is the type of experience that comes only once in a lifetime. I am just so thankful that it came in *my* lifetime. ✧

MEMBERSHIP — DIGITALLY ENHANCED

by Patriot CM Smrt • Chapter 146, Senior Vice Commander



IT'S NOT, "DID YOU SIGN UP A NEW MEMBER?" Sometimes, it's when and how.

Here is a tale of two winters.

The freeze of 2017 frustrated Mike more than his Iraq deployment. His apartment Internet service was downed by ice storm's electrical outages. A cell call to national headquarters placed Mike in touch with the local MOPH chapter. He gathered all documents and records and met me at a nearby McDonald's, where the lights were on, coffee was hot and burgers and fries were plentiful.

By using the smartphone camera, the supporting DOCs were photographed. An application form in the Nov/Dec 2017 *Purple Heart Magazine* was completed, signed and scanned. All JPGs were uploaded and sent to a willing and waiting MOPH membership. Our digital upload was confirmed by return phone call from HQ wherein payment was accepted as credit card data was transmitted by voice. Not counting the 30-minute lunch, Mike became the chapter's newest member in less than 20 minutes.

The 2014 winter had found Chapter 146 outside its local American Legion Hall when they read the handwritten note stating "Post 201 Closed, Frozen Pipes!"

Not to miss the valued time and effort made by assembled Patriots huddled in the snowy-cold parking lot, an impromptu chapter meeting was called to order. Honors were rendered to a 7x10-inch flag that once graced a Veterans' Day ceremony. In record time minutes were accepted, the finance Report was read, old and new business came and went. What remained was the impression on a Purple Heart recipient who was "visiting" for the first time.

Though busy rebuilding his post-deployment life, taking care of his family and securing a job in the local metro police department, Dexter never forgot that first chapter meeting held in a freezing parking lot by a group of Patriots that loved their country, their military service and each other. When settled, after 18 months of Chapter 146 emails later, Dexter finished his digital application and has been an active OIF/OEF MOPH life member.



MOPH Participates in the 2018 Pasadena Rose Parade

by MOPH Public Relations

ON JANUARY 1, A UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL FLOAT created by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs (IOOF) joined the 2018 Rose Parade, a century-old New Year's Day celebration that featured 44 floats, 20 equestrian units with approximately 400 horses and 21 marching bands that completed a 5.5-mile journey along Colorado Blvd. in Pasadena, Calif. For the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the parade marked a new "first" in the history of the Order by partnering with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs who have participated in the Rose Parade since 1908.

As winner of the coveted "Director's Trophy," the Odd Fellows float was amongst the leaders of the parade, immediately following the naming sponsor's float (Honda), the 2018 Rose Parade Grand Marshal (Gary Sinise), and the U.S. Marine Corps marching band and mounted color guard. One major difference from past years was that a special group of veterans was riding on the float, representing all of our Nation's Purple Heart recipients, and were waving to the hundreds of thousands of spectators that lined the streets along the parade route, and the more than 70 million television viewers worldwide during Pasadena's 129th annual Rose Parade on New Year's Day.

To complement the "Making a Difference" theme of

the 2018 Rose Parade, the Odd Fellows' float was titled "Sacrifice to Serve," and featured the head of a bald eagle and a large Purple Heart medal as a special tribute to those members of the U.S. military who have received the Purple Heart medal. In addition to dignitaries of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the riders on the float included four Patriots of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and three Purple Heart recipients who are members of the Odd Fellows.

The Odd Fellows and Rebekahs Rose Float Organization is incorporated as a 501c(3) Charitable Corporation to provide an educational experience for the public by teaching volunteers to sponsor, design, build, decorate

and enter a float that is a work of art in the annual Rose Parade. During the last week of December each year, the process of decorating the float starts in the early hours of the morning and continues until late at night by dozens of members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs who congregate in Southern California for a few days of camaraderie, fellowship and sunny weather. Contributions from the public are most welcome and appreciated.

Under the watchful eye and expert guidance of master float builders Roberta Prosk and her son John, the Rose float slowly came to life. Building the float is a labor of love in which all services by the members are volunteered—no one gets paid to work on the float or the IOOF organizing committee.

This year the Odd Fellows Sovereign Grand Master



bers of the Odd Fellows, were Bob Laizure, 93, who enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1943 and served as an anti-aircraft gunner in World War II; Norman Sumner, 77, who served two tours in Vietnam as a USMC helicopter crew chief and left in 1968 as a staff sergeant with a Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart; and, Ronald Hanson, who served with the 1st Air Cavalry Division in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969 and received the Purple Heart for wounds sustained during a nighttime attack by enemy sappers.

This year marks the Odd Fellows' 62nd consecutive year of participation, and their floats have often been recognized by the parade judges for the complex and painstakingly precise detail of the artistic workmanship. The entire surface of a Rose Parade float *must* be covered in natural materials such as seeds, beans, grains, fruits,



All Odd Fellows float riders



Grand Marshal Gary Sinise greets riders



Jim Anderson, Sonya Broadway & Norm Sumner riders

John Miller and California Grand Master Dave Reed honored the Military Order of the Purple Heart with an invitation to join in the decoration of the float and to accompany them on its voyage through Pasadena. Four members of the MOPH, including National Commander Neil Van Ess; Department of California Commander Jim Anderson; Houston, Texas Patriot and NSO, Sonya Broadway; and National Public Relations Director John Bircher assisted in decorating and then riding on the float. Bircher developed and coordinated MOPH's contributions to the decoration of the float and participation in the Rose Parade.

The three additional Purple Heart recipients, all mem-

vegetables, tree bark, leaves, fresh or dried flowers, etc. The surfaces that appear to be "painted" are actually coated with a layer of white glue, upon which is manually dabbed powdered floral material, which is prepared by grinding seeds and flower petals into a fine dust. Many different floral materials are required to achieve the wide range of colors.

The float was meticulously decorated with many types of floral materials, including a final bed of 11,000 red roses, 1,000 white roses and hundreds of purple irises. The 2018 Tournament of Roses judging of floats for parade trophies was held the morning of December 31, 2017, in the Phoenix float construction facility in Irwindale, Calif.



MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART OF THE U.S.A NATIONAL OFFICERS 2017-2018



Just a few of the many volunteer decorators



Roberta & John Prosk



Van Ess & Anderson add Irises to Purple Heart

Michelle Lofthouse, daughter of the Phoenix Decorating Company founder Bill Lofthouse, has been designing floats for over 30 years and personally designed this year's IOOF float.

Not only was this year's float singled out for its patriotic significance, but was awarded the "Director's Trophy" for most outstanding artistic design and use of floral and non-floral materials.

If you are wondering whether MOPH participation in the Rose Parade was a cost-effective public relations and promotional vehicle, the answer is a resounding yes! All costs of the float construction, decoration and participation were borne by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs. In terms of TV viewership and public awareness, the Rose Parade is an event nearly on par with football's Super Bowl. The float was viewed by approximately 700,000 people, who line the 5.5-mile parade route, and by at least 70 million more who watched in 127 countries, including

China, via national and international television broadcasts. This is truly a huge viewing audience that may have heard about the Military Order of the Purple Heart for the first time, and will hopefully be encouraged to



learn more about its mission of support to veterans and their families.

As the Purple Heart float glided down Colorado Blvd., Commander Van Ess, a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran, felt the weight of 50 years of shame, disappointment, and resentment being lifted from his shoulders. As he waved to the crowds, he could hear the individual voices of many of the bystanders calling out, "Thank you," and "Thanks for your service." For Van Ess,

it was a profound experience. He felt he was finally receiving the "Welcome home" that had eluded him for so many years. Reflecting on the week's events, Commander Van Ess summed up his personal feelings when he said, "This is the type of experience that comes only once in a lifetime. I am just so thankful that it came in my lifetime." ✪



All Purple Heart recipients on the float



Thousands of flowers of all varieties



Painting with ground spices, seeds, and flowers

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