

The Veterans History Project

Pray Funeral Home, Inc.

Charlotte, MI

The City of Charlotte has a strong VFW presence, full of helping hands in the community, inspiring stories of our nation's history, and a willingness to share the experiences of military service with those interested. This year, Pray Funeral Home decided to take our interest in our local veterans to a new level and imprint their stories and experiences into our national record.

We contacted the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress to learn about how we could participate in the newly formed Veterans History Project (VHP). We received a field kit, consisting of necessary biographical forms and recording standards for interviewing Veterans. The VHP gathers video interviews, photographs and other like materials submitted by Veterans or on the behalf of a Veteran and records them into the Library of Congress. The interviews are stored under professional standards and are eventually uploaded to the VHP website (www.loc.gov/vets) with the Veterans name and interviewers name – in this case, Pray Funeral Home. In this way, these interviews become a part of our national record forever.

Using the field kit, we set out to capture video interviews of our local veterans. We sent letters to the local VFW and American Legion. We placed a newspaper ad. We made phone calls, and we organized with our local VFW Post 2406 to hold multiple sessions for Veterans to sign up for an interview time at the Post. We conducted several individual interviews in this manner, and also privately in the home's of veterans who called us to make an appointment. One Veteran traveled from Lansing to our Funeral Home for an interview.

We used two semi-professional cameras and edited all footage to include the veteran's name and record of service. We completed all necessary forms with the veteran and then assembled each entry and mailed it to the Library of Congress. Each veteran also receives a copy, as well as our local library. To date, we have submitted 13 interviews to the VHP and are waiting on paperwork to submit three more soon.

Our community benefits by having access to these stories forever. The families of the veterans are very grateful to have their veteran's story on record. In one case, the veteran died a week after the interview, and we were able to give them the copy of his war stories, something many of them had never heard and will always cherish. They remember that Pray Funeral Home helped do this and will think of us when thinking of the many memories associated with their elder loved ones.

Bringing the VHP to our town helped demonstrate our activeness in the community and dedication to preserving local history. It also promotes the idea of collecting and preserving family history, which may help inspire people to realize the importance of Remembrance and memorialization as they realize the value of the stories of their senior generation. Perhaps families will also choose to incorporate a similar video interview structure with their pre-arrangement, which can provide a powerful resource for their funeral's, allowing them the opportunity to share their stories and memories. We are always striving to reinforce the idea of using video as an instrument of ceremony to be included in a meaningful and powerful funeral for the families we serve and appreciate.