

Senator Lugar Endorses Operation Welcome Home effort!



A NATIONAL CELEBRATION
OF AMERICA'S VIETNAM
VETERANS...AND ALL
THOSE WHO SERVE

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July 2-6, 2008
North East Indiana

"...that we never forget
the cost of freedom
& the courageous men
and women who have
paid the price..."

Hosted By:



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -- Photos from previous OWH events available on request

Welcome Home Event Will Embrace Vietnam Veterans and All Who Serve

Auburn, Angola, Fort Wayne Rally to Support GIs, past and present

AUBURN, IN – Indiana Senator Richard Lugar is urging veterans from across America to visit northern Indiana next summer “to receive the gratitude of a nation.”

2008 marks 35 years since America’s withdrawal from Vietnam. To acknowledge that bittersweet anniversary – and to honor America’s GIs, past present and future, several northern Indiana cities are joining with an Indiana Foundation and an Ohio-based non-profit to throw a huge celebration honoring Vietnam veterans...and all who serve. The celebration will be the third national Operation Welcome Home, following successful events in Las Vegas (2005) and California (2006).

“From the Revolutionary War to the current Global War on Terror, Americans have faced harrowing circumstances in defense of freedom. It is appropriate to pause to recognize the men and women who selflessly served in our nation's military,” Lugar said. “The Midwest Operation Welcome Home will provide a unique opportunity to celebrate our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who risked their lives during the Vietnam War.”

The third national Operation Welcome Home will be held in northern Indiana, July 2-6, 2008. According to organizers, the Midwest Operation Welcome Home (OWH) will feature

a large welcome home parade, entertainers, exhibitors, fireworks, special activities, tours, and powerful memorial services. Host organizations for the event are the Dean V. Kruse Foundation of Auburn, IN and the American Veterans (AVI) Institute based in Tipp City, OH. Kruse founded the World War II Victory Museum in Auburn. AVI founders developed the Operation Welcome Home concept in 2004 and have organized or participated in numerous celebrations, including the two previous national events.

The communities of Auburn, Angola, and Fort Wayne are working together to ensure that Vietnam veterans and all participating GIs and veterans will know the gratitude of a nation. Organizers promise a slate of exciting activities and travel discounts, as well as free entertainment, in numerous locations up and down the I-69 corridor.

In 1999 entrepreneur Dean Kruse paid \$22 million to move the assets of the Belgian Victory Museum and to Auburn, IN, to create the World War II Victory Museum. That facility is now transitioning into the National Military History Center (NMHC), which will pay tribute to America's military from all conflicts. Kruse is working closely with AVI to build a strategic plan for the NMHC and to establish the American Veterans Hall of Honor and the American Veterans Research Library. Organizers plan an official name changing ceremony at the facility during July's Welcome Home event. The Kruse facility on I-69 will serve as "celebration central" during the four-day event.

Organizers say the Indiana Convention and Visitors Bureaus and the hospitality community are "going the extra mile in developing 'veteran-friendly' activities and travel packages. We have been thrilled with the reaction of communities and organizations across northern Indiana," said AVI and OWH Founder Mike Jackson, Lt Col. USAF (Ret), himself a disabled Vietnam veteran. "For the past couple years, people have been asking why we didn't organize a Midwest Operation Welcome Home. Judging by the enthusiastic response of everyone we've talked to, it's long overdue."

Jackson and his partner, Tara Engel, recently received a warm welcome from the Indiana VFW convention in Indianapolis, as they explained the scope and purpose of Operation Welcome Home. Jackson said the objective of the celebration is to honor the men and women who served in Southeast Asia, in addition to thanking *all those* who have served America, from World War II to the Cold warriors and those who served in Somalia, Grenada, Panama, Iraq and everywhere in between. "But we are also working to dispel the stereotype of the Vietnam veteran once and for all. These men and women are the backbone of America...your teachers, doctors, lawyers, parents and grandparents. They haven't spoken much about their service because, for many years, America didn't want to hear it," the decorated combat pilot said. "Well, that is changing in a way that stuns even the most hardened cynic. It's time to heal the past – and it is also

essential that we let a new generation of GIs know that we will not desert them...ever.”

Jackson added that the celebration needs patriotic citizens as much as it needs veterans. “We need folks from all over to show up and offer their gratitude to these brave men and women. I’ve seen the look of surprise and relief when a Vietnam veteran is embraced and thanked. It doesn’t change the past, but it washes away years of frustration and sadness. As a Vietnam veteran myself, I can’t begin to explain the impact...you have to experience it to understand it.”

Those who wish to participate in the celebration can find out more by going to www.nationaloperationwelcomehome.com or www.nationalowh.org or by calling 937.669.2040 or 260.927.9144.

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SIDEBAR: The name changing ceremony is one of many activities slated for the 4th of July weekend. Plans include a large July 2 motorcycle parade to escort the traveling Vietnam Wall to its weekend location at the Kruse facility, followed by a dinner and band at the “celebration central” site on Interstate 69; exhibits and activities at the Kruse facility throughout the four-day event; a memorial service and sponsors’ gala the night of July 3; a USO show on Friday and Saturday; an Operation Welcome Home parade in nearby Angola on July 4; fireworks on July 4 & 5; a performance by the U.S. Air Force Band of Flight; museum tours, car shows and numerous reunion activities. More activities are being added daily, as sponsors jump on board and more organizations ask to participate.

Organizers want to hear from veterans, potential sponsors, entertainers, and anyone who wishes to honor the men and women who serve our nation. Details of the celebration and related projects are at www.NationalOperationWelcomeHome.com and www.AmericanVeteransInstitute.org. Veteran supporters and those planning to attend the Midwest celebration can coordinate with each other and offer words of gratitude via www.GIzone.net, a new project of the American Veterans Institute. Potential sponsors or participants can contact the Kruse Foundation at 260.927.9144 or the American Veterans Institute at 937.669.2040, or at info@americanveteransinstitute.org.