

Former Resident Has His Own Museum

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

This column has on occasion featured stories of the “local boy makes good” genre. There is no way we can continue that general theme, because there are so many local youths, male and female, that have gone on to be persons of significance in the country.

Today’s story is different, for how many people do you know that OWN their own museum? Not just a closet or basement collection of stuff, but significant material open to the public on a frequent and scheduled basis? This man is Joel Parkinson, graduate of Baraboo High School Class of 1978, and he recently opened a World War Museum in Alliance, Ohio.

He comes by this for good reason, his Father being Baraboo’s well known and well remembered Bob Parkinson. I should say Circus World’s well recognized member also, for Bob actually has a museum named after him, Baraboo’s world renowned Robert L Parkinson Library and Research Center. This is the world’s largest repository of circus memorabilia and artifacts. So Joel comes by the museum business naturally.

Naturally in another way, too, for Joel as a youth played with his Father’s old set of toy soldiers and other military things. Now Joel is not a military veteran, but he has always been fascinated with anything military. Other collections followed the toy soldiers, and he has been a collector well into his adult life, enough so that his military museum collection covers 9000 square feet in an Alliance Mall.

The old toy soldiers are there, but the collection has gone far beyond that, with significant authentic military paraphernalia. Generally known as the World War Museum it is more properly called the World War History and Art Museum. It is located in an attractive double front store in the College Plaza, and is open Tuesday through Saturday. Internet is WWW.wwham.com.

Featured along with extensive news reports are 289 original paintings and drawings by American and other servicemen from both world wars, giving their impressions of the conflict. Among these poignant mementos of war is an art piece by his grandfather from WWI. Another sketch show soldiers headed to the trenches as rats head the other way. Smart rats!

There is a section on women’s role in the war effort, a section on armed combat experiences, and one called “Hitler’s Steps: Bluster, Bluffs, Blitzkrieg, and blunders”. Space is also reserved for local veterans to contribute articles of war and personal experiences before it is too late due to human attrition.

So, how could this former Sauk County Youth find the time to do this? A former job on nuclear research on submarines was his vocation, but his lifelong fascination with things military called him. With the help of his family, he resolved to live out his dream of a museum of his own. Joel’s Mother Marilyn Parkinson, graciously supplied material for this article.

