Pride of Herndon bound for Normandy D-Day anniversary

■ Saturday rock concert to officially kick-off band's fundraising campaign

By Angela Woolsey
FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

The Herndon High School band's drumline performing.

Herndon High School's marching band will represent the U.S. in Normandy, France, in June 2019 for the 75th anniversary of D-Day, the day when Allied troops invaded Western Europe in World War II.

The band received an invitation from the nonprofit Historic Programs, which organizes commemorative events at historic locations around the world, after winning grand champion for its performance at the Pearl Harbor Memorial Parade in Hawaii in 2013.

"Getting to represent not just Herndon, not just Virginia, but the entirety of the United States will be a life-shaping experience for our students," Herndon High School band director Kathleen Jacoby said. "Not only are they connecting with current-day Americans, but we're asking them to…put themselves in the shoes of the brave men who were on the beaches of Normandy."

In addition to sending an estimated 150 students and 50 chaperones to the week-long festivities next year, the high school's band department and parent volunteers have been working to turn the D-Day anniversary into a tribute to veterans and the Town of Herndon's connection to World War II.

The Town of Herndon was named after U.S. Navy Commander William Lewis Herndon, who died in the sinking of the S.S. Central America in 1857, according to the town's website.

Herndon's legacy resonated beyond the town as the U.S. Navy later named two ships after the commander.

The first U.S.S. Herndon was transferred to Great Britain prior to the U.S.'s entry into World War II and later renamed the H.M.S. Churchill.

The second U.S.S. Herndon launched from the Norfolk Navy Yard in 1942. It garnered the nickname the "Lucky Herndon" after leading the first wave of assaults on D-Day from Omaha Beach and surviving without any damage.

Herndon High School band volunteer Margaret Jamborsky, whose 9th-grade daughter plays piccolo in the Herndon High School band, says that she was unaware of the U.S.S. Herndon until she attended the first meeting of a committee of band parents formed to guide preparations and fundraising for the Normandy anniversary trip.

After learning about the town's ties to the World War II destroyer, Jamborsky visited the Herndon Historical Society Museum and discovered an original muster roll with the names of every U.S.S. Herndon crew member.

"I looked at it, pages and pages of names, and I'm like oh no, we're not just honoring a ship," Jamborsky said. "We are honoring men of the Greatest Generation. How do we do that?"

The answer involved a full year of research, as Jamborsky scoured newspaper archives, death records, grave sites, and online databases to track down all 300 men who had served on the Herndon.

So far, Jamborsky has managed to find 235 families. Most of the time, her search ends with a relative of one of the former servicemen, but she has also contacted 16 veterans who were still alive, though two of them died earlier this year.

When she contacts the veterans and their families, Jamborsky asks each of them for a photo of the person who served on the U.S.S. Herndon.

Each of the band students who visits Normandy next year will carry a photo of one of the servicemen, along with pictures of any family members they might have who served in the European theater during World War II.

"What these students are doing is wonderful," U.S.S. Herndon veteran Tom Wilmore said, according to a press release from the Herndon band parent volunteers. "It means the world to me that they are honoring me and my shipmates in Normandy."

PHOTOS BY CRAIG DUBISHAR

The Herndon High School band marches in the 2017 Herndon Homecoming Parade.

Wilmore lived in Port Neches, Texas, when he died at the age of 92 on Mar. 6, according to an obituary in The Port Arthur News.

Jamborsky's daughter will represent Wilmore at the 75th D-Day anniversary event in Normandy.

Along with honoring the U.S.S. Herndon crew, students will bring sand from Virginia to the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial near Omaha Beach in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

The 172-acre cemetery site contains 9,385 graves, mostly for military members who died in the D-Day landings and subsequent operations.

According to Jamborsky, the cemetery includes graves for 250 Virginians, in addition to 30 others who are listed on the cemetery's Walls of the Missing for soldiers whose bodies were not found.

"We're going to get Virginia sand, and each student is going to go to the graves of each and every Virginian there to deliver a piece of home to these men who made the ultimate sacrifice," Jamborsky said.

Finally, students will collect sand from Utah Beach, one of the five landing areas for the D-Day invasion, and send it back to the U.S.S. Herndon veterans and families, accompanied by letters and the photos they carried.

"I have goose bumps just talking…about it," Jamborsky said. "It's going to change their lives. It's going to give them a whole new perspective on history."

Before any of that happens, though, the band needs to get to Normandy.

The trip will cost approximately $600,000, or an estimated $3,000 per student, to cover lodging, airfare, and other expenses, according to Ken Ozkaptan, a band parent who will have two children going to the D-Day anniversary.

Ozkaptan is leading the organization of the Herndon High School Marching Band Kick-Off Celebration and Benefit Concert, a free music concert and fundraising event scheduled to take place at the Herndon Town Green starting at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday.

An alternative date for the event in case of rain has been set for May 12.

With the Herndon High School jazz band and saxophone ensemble opening the show, the kick-off event will center on a performance by the rock band, The 5:55.

Attendance to the concert is free, but patrons are encouraged to donate, and the band is looking for corporate sponsors as well.

While band volunteer parents have been organizing various fundraisers, including citrus and greens sales, throughout the past year, the kick-off celebration will be the first major push for donations.

The Herndon POPs Chamber Ensemble, a group consisting of Herndon High School students and alumni of both Herndon and other Fairfax County Public Schools, will host a full-length concert at the school auditorium on June 3. All proceeds will go to the band's trip to Normandy, according to a Facebook page for the event.

Green Lizard Cycling, a local bike shop, is also planning to assist with fundraising during its 3rd annual Fun Ride Bike-A-Thon on Oct. 7. The race is co-sponsored by the Rotary Club of Herndon, and all of the fee benefits from riders will go to the Pride of Herndon Marching Band.

Organizers say they want to ensure that every student in the band will be able to go on the trip regardless of their family's financial situation.

"Not everyone can afford this trip," Ozkaptan said. "We have a lot of kids in our community on free and reduced lunch, so everyone has different circumstances. It's important that the community rally around to give this opportunity to the kids through the fundraising event."

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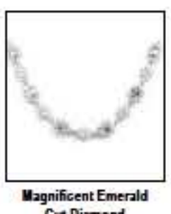

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