

Sova makes sure Aljets, Merchant Marines, get proper salute for contributions

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - Sheila Sova is not one to give up on veterans getting proper recognition.

Part of Sova's motivation is because of her father - Orville Sova. Orville was a United States Merchant Marine World War II veteran and an Army Korean War veteran. Her father was born in 1927 and died in 2015.

Sova came across another World War II Merchant Marine - Edwardsville's Frederick "Fritz" Aljets, the previous owner of Aljets Automotive, now in his 90s, and wanted to make sure he received some recognition. Many Merchant Marines were never recognized for their role in World War II, yet they played a vital role, she said.

The Merchant Marine group leads civilian ships used to transport both imports and exports during peacetime and serves as an auxiliary to the Navy during times of war, delivering both troops and supplies. The United States Merchant Marine Academy is one of five United States service academies.

This past May, she was on hand with Aljets for a flag ceremony at the new Veterans Honor Park in Chesterfield, Mo.

"I was proud to escort him to the flag pole with the Honor Guard and help them raise the Merchant Marines flag," she said. "Fritz also came to the American Merchant Marine Veterans Convention in Reno, Nev., in March. He wore his original World War II uniform in the ceremony in Chesterfield, Mo."

There has been work done in Congress asking for certain Merchant Marine recognition, but that has not materialized, Sova said. She said she will continue to fight for proper recognition of their contributions to America.

Frederick Sova belonged to a Merchant Marine chapter in St. Louis and so did, Aljets, so Aljets came to his funeral.

"I sort of adopted him after the funeral and I was able to invite him to the event in Chesterfield, Mo.," Shelia said.

"When they asked Fritz and I to walk out and raise the Merchant Marine flag for the opening ceremony as the flag was being raised, Fritz has tears in his eyes and I did as well since I knew my father was watching from up above. It was raining that day and Fritz was using a cane. I asked him as we were walking out to the flagpole if he was okay and he said 'I have to be.'"

“He knew he was representing the entire Merchant Marine Fleet of 250,000 men that were in World War II. The photographer took his picture and several people told me his face was priceless as the flag was raised.”

