



Honor Flight Rejuvenates American Pride for Two Area Vets

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In the early morning hours of Monday, March 24, two Alton area veterans were taken by bus to the Springfield's Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport. By sunrise, Bob Mortland, 80, and Pete Kochersperger, 92, were on a plane heading toward Washington D.C. as part of Land of Lincoln's 25th Honor Flight.

"We were bright eyed and ready to go," said Kochersperger. "We were so excited, and couldn't wait to see what the Honor Flight was all about."

The Honor Flight program is a nation-wide network that began in 2005, dedicated to providing all veterans who apply a free trip to Washington, D.C. to visit memorials honoring their service and sacrifice.

"We were treated like royalty from start to finish," Kochersperger added. "I had a guardian that was able to push me around town so that I could see everything there was to see."

Trained volunteer guardians will provide assistance and accompany our veterans on their flight. The program also gives top priority on every flight to any veteran who has a terminal illness.



Both Mortland and Kochersperger (pictured here with Devon Neal) are enrollees in the Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies program at Senior Services Plus, which is where they both learned about the Honor Flight.

“We had heard of it, but not really filled in on the details,” said Mortland. “We attended a breakfast at Senior Services Plus on Veteran’s Day, where Land of Lincoln Honor Flight came and spoke to our group and gave us the chance to sign up.”

The Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies program, which is funded through the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Scratch off Lottery Cash Grant, provides a Wellness Center membership, personal training, and monthly social networking events at no cost to the veteran. Enrollees may be from any conflict, but must have proof of honorable discharge and a minimum of 10% disability rating.

“The entire experience was emotional, and at some points, overwhelming,” added Mortland. “We would definitely go again if we could.”

Each veteran was provided with sponsored meals and gifts, as well as a t-shirt and hat, color coordinated to the individual’s conflict: blue for WWII, yellow for Korea, & red for Vietnam.

While in the country's capitol, Mortland and Kochersperger were able to visit historical sites like the WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War Memorials. They also stopped at the Lincoln Memorial, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, the United States Air Force Memorial, and Arlington Cemetery's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

On their flight home, each Veteran experienced "mail call", where letters and cards were given out. Representatives from Land of Lincoln obtained the notes by reaching out to high school students in the Springfield area.

When asked their favorite part of the trip, both locals were naming off several sites and highlights. It was evident that both Mortland and Kochersperger had a very memorable time on their flight.

"The flight was moving for us both, and we were glad to experience it together as friends," said Kochersperger. "We were all from different conflicts, but during that flight we were all united, and were able to share the passion that we all have for our country."