

The Veterans Voice



Newsletter of the New Hampshire Veterans Home, Fall, 2013

Commandant's Report

Margaret "Peggy" LaBrecque



The greatest gift is you

Greetings and Happy Fall:

I can not believe that the Holidays will shortly be upon us.

As the autumn leaves have turned colors and fallen, much has happened here at the Home. The residents have been busy with trips to see the foliage and to ball games and other events around the state. The Home's annual Family Fun Day, an intergenerational celebration, was a huge success, attended by scores of residents and staff and their families. The beautiful weather made it a fun day for everyone.

Activities are a key element in the care we provide here at the Veterans Home. We continue to plan new and exciting trips and many other recreational activities to keep the residents from being bored. That's vital, since boredom can lead to loneliness -- and loneliness leads to depression.

This time of year -- or really at any time -- the greatest gift any of our residents can receive is a visit from you. Visits help keep the loneliness of missing loved ones at bay. Visits remind our residents that they are not forgotten, that they are loved by those that they love the most -- you.

With the holiday just past, please join me in wishing all of our residents a "Happy Veterans Day!" Thank them for their service and sacrifice, and remember to thank the families of all veterans for their sacrifice as well.

I look forward to seeing all of you over the next couple of months as the Home celebrates Thanksgiving, Christmas and rings in the New Year.

Peggy LaBrecque

Resident Profile: Joel Nordholm

Master musher comes full circle

Things have come pretty much full circle for Joel Nordholm.

A path that started out around the age of 4 with a little dog sled ride through the farm fields that surrounded the New Hampshire Veterans Home in the 1930s has brought him back to the top of Winter Street after a most uncommon life: championship musher, well-known dog breeder, Smithsonian-recognized master dogsled builder, agricultural agent, teacher, and more.

That early jaunt got him hooked on dogsledding from the start, he says, and he was already breeding and training dogs for his teams by his early teenage years. His father bought him his first dog for \$15, but he soon

got pretty sharp at his own dog dealings. In one trade with Bill Shearer, president of Paine Furniture Co., and a major figure on the New England racing circuit that centered on Laconia at the time, Shearer didn't even realize he was dealing with a 14-year-old, he says.

Joel won his first dogsled race in the early 1940s at 14, while he was still in high school. He'd end up competing on the New England circuit for the next several decades, running his last 100-mile race in the early 1960s. Laconia was a well-known center for the sport in those days, he said. It was pretty

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She's on the Calendar



For the second consecutive year, a work by a resident of the New Hampshire Veterans Home has been chosen for the "Member Masterpiece" calendar published by the New Hampshire Health Care Association. Artist Joan Ryder is shown above with her winning work, "Reflections," in a photo taken in August, when her painting took first place in our resident art competition.

A master musher makes his way back to Winter Street

much a Franco-American thing, imported by the thousands of Quebecois who had migrated south to work in New Hampshire's bustling textile mills.

Pointing to a picture on his wall of Ovide Carrier, winner of the 1936 Laconia 100-miler with one of his dogs, he ruefully recalls the scandal the following year when many dogs' feet were cut up by sharp ice when, due to what he calls driver greed, the race pressed on despite bad conditions. The state veterinarian, who also happened to be the mayor of Laconia at the time, shut the race down and it didn't resume until after the war, at much shorter distance. It's currently 15 miles.

Joel described how he'd start training puppies for the team at 6 months old, hitching two at a time to the front of his bicycle and getting pulled around town. "I learned as much from the dogs as the dogs learned from me," he said.

A Tilton native – at one time his father was chairman of the local school board and his mother was alumni secretary and music director for the Tilton School – he spent his junior and senior years of high school at the Tilton School, where he played basketball and other sports.

His dog-racing career took a break for Naval service in the Pacific during World War II, though he'd actually had a chance to keep working with dogs as a sled-dog handler in one of the little-known "Arctic search and rescue team" units set up during the war. But he passed on it after a friend warned him about the lonely lifestyle of heavy drinking and gambling that went on in the remote outposts. Not to mention that the idea seemed pretty half-baked to him, with bureaucrats suggesting things like trying to mount heavy machine guns on dogsleds.

Joel returned to his New Hampshire roots after the war, getting a degree in agronomy and animal husbandry from the Uni-



Joel Nordholm talks dogs with Whattleigh Torsey, owner of Barking Brook Sled Dog Adventures in Plymouth, who brought one of her dogs with her on a recent visit.

versity of New Hampshire and going to work in a series of jobs as a county agricultural agent, then into a federal agricultural agency. That job took him to a series of posts mostly in upstate New York. After a decade or so of that, he wanted to stop moving his family around and returned to New Hampshire, where he did a spate of miscellaneous jobs, in-

cluding teaching middle school in Claremont for a year.

He retired at 62, and after he stopped racing, moved into serious dogsled building, a craft he'd started to learn in the 1950s. He got into the sled-making because "I wanted a new sled and I couldn't afford one," he said. That was when, he points out, they cost about 30 bucks each.



A pair of Joel's beautiful hand-built white ash dogsleds, prized items in the state's mushing community.

He said he picked up some tips from Ed Moody, a dog-racing friend and master sled builder, but otherwise he's entirely self-taught in all of the arcane of sled-building, like exactly how long to steam the white ash wood to get it to bend without breaking. He introduced some innovations in his sleds, such as plastic runners instead of the much heavier steel ones, and lashing the frame together, at first with rawhide, later nylon cord, for lighter weight and better flexibility.

His craftsmanship has received a number of honors. In 1999, he did a two-week residency at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., demonstrating the craft. In 2005, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts awarded him a Traditional Arts Apprenticeship grant to pass along the skills to Karen Jones, owner of a Husky kennel in Tamworth and a veteran musher herself.

Because of employment and family obligations, Joel never made it to Alaska to compete in the Iditarod, the 1,000-mile Seward-to-Nome trek that's the world's most famous dogsled race.

But he has no regrets. It's an entirely different race now, with groomed trails, cell phones, veterinary services and mandatory stopoffs. No more mushing through blizzards. He says he doesn't follow the dog racing scene any longer.

In all, Joel says he's been blessed: with a working career where he was on his own a lot, with bosses who did not hover; with a good marriage – his wife passed away a few years ago; and with two grown daughters who've both been successful in life.

And he's still enjoying his regular walks into downtown Tilton. He's a familiar figure to drivers on Winter Street, where one homeowner installed a bench with a "veterans' rest stop" sign, probably with him in mind.

Celebrating the Holidays at NHVH



Planning on dining out with your loved one on Thanksgiving or Christmas? Please let the social worker on your resident's unit know as far in advance as possible. Or arrangements can be made to share a meal here at the Home, although we can't accommodate large groups. An accurate head count helps out with planning and makes life just a bit easier for Food Service Director Lynn Hilbrunner and her dedicated staff, who nourish our residents 365 days of the year.

Please Sponsor a Veteran's Christmas Present

Dear Friends of the New Hampshire Veterans Home:

I am writing to ask for your support in making this another successful holiday season at the Home.

A few years ago, we changed the process for collecting holiday gifts for our residents. In lieu of donors purchasing individual items, we began asking for cash contributions to our annual Christmas Fund.

This has been a great success that has let us provide every one of our residents with the gift they hoped for. Not a single gift has had to be returned.

This process enables us to identify residents' needs, shop and wrap gifts for Santa to distribute, and ensure a gift is under the Christmas tree for each resident on Christmas Day.

We care for nearly 200 residents at the Veterans Home; our goal is to raise \$50 per person.

We hope, with your support, to get a good jump on the project this year. Last year your generous donations made sure that every resident was sponsored.

And you'll still be able to sponsor a particular resident or group of residents under this policy. The gift will note you as the

sponsor. Contact Christine Garner or Maureen Campbell in our Recreation Department at (603) 527-4815 or 527-4889 if you want to sponsor a particular person or group.

Please help us continue to make the holidays a special time at the Veterans Home. We ask you to make out checks to: "NHVH Resident Benefit Fund" and reference "Christmas" and the resident's (or group of residents') name(s).

Please mail your donation to the NH Veterans Home Christmas Fund for Residents, 139 Winter Street, Tilton, NH 03276.

We thank you again for your steadfast support of those who served.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peggy LaBreegue".

Decoration Guidelines

To minimize potential fire hazards associated with holiday decorations, please observe these guidelines. Questions? Contact the Safety Department, x4451.

- No live or natural cut Christmas trees, garland or wreaths.
- Artificial trees must be small and labeled "flame retardant" or "flame resistant," and UL-approved. No Fiber optic trees or decorations.
- No electric lights or devices of any kind allowed in resident care areas. Unbreakable ornaments and battery operated lights are an alternative.
- Before using electrical light strings for decorations in nonresident care areas, they must be checked by the Maintenance and/or Safety Department for proper operation (fraying, bare wires, loose connections, cracked plastic parts).
- Electrical light strings used for decorations MUST be unplugged at the end of the day.
- All decorations must be labeled non-combustible and flame retardant. Proxylon plastic and crepe paper decorations aren't permitted.
- Decorations may not impair the proper operation of the fire system (pull stations, smoke/heat detectors, fire extinguishers).
- Nothing may be attached or hung from fire sprinkler heads or ceiling tiles.
- Decorations or displays may not obstruct any exit corridor, doorway, or stairway.
- All decorations must be kept away from exit signs, and all lights.
- Wall decorations may not exceed 20 percent of wall surface in resident care areas, 30 percent in non-resident care areas. Excessive amounts of Christmas cards should not be hung on doors or walls.
- Open flames of any type, including candles, are prohibited.

Thank you and have a happy and safe holiday season.

NHVH Safety & Security Department

A reminder on holiday gifts

As the holidays approach, residents and their families may want to show their appreciation for the care they or their loved ones receive here at NHVH. Please remember that under the New Hampshire Veterans Home's Ethics and Professional Conduct Policy, staff members are not to accept any gifts or money from residents or families. Only group gifts for the entire staff are acceptable. The generosity of the gesture is deeply appreciated. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but we must refuse any individual gifts.



New Hampshire Veterans Home

Margaret D. LaBrecque, Commandant
139 Winter Street
Tilton, NH 03276
Phone: 603-527-4400
Fax: 603-527-4402
Website: www.nh.gov/veterans

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Newsletter editor: Len Stuart, Program Information Officer
603-527-4898 / Leonard.stuart@nhvh.nh.gov

Return Service Requested

Upcoming Events



12/6/13 Pearl Harbor Remembrance
11 a.m. Town Hall



12/19/13 39th Army Band Concert
7 p.m. - Town Hall

'Tis the season to remember safety

After what seemed like a ridiculously short summer, colder weather is back! So here are a few things to be mindful of at this time of year, for employees and visitors alike:

clocks off Daylight Saving Time, but if you haven't, it's never too late!

- **Proper footwear:** Remember that temperatures drop at night and black ice can form from the smallest amounts of water, so those sneakers and flat shoes that got you through the summer won't save you if you step on black ice.
- **Slow down:** Statistically, more auto accidents occur in fall and spring than winter, and that's because all of the oils that get saturated into the pavement are brought to the surface and aren't washed away with the typically lower amounts of precipitation.
- **Fire protection:** Everyone should have changed the batteries in their smoke detectors with the changing of the



Brian Baker
Safety/Security Team