

AMERICAN VETERANS HERITAGE CENTER, INC.

2006 ANNUAL REPORT

The year 2006 was a very active one for American Veterans Heritage Center, Inc. (AVHC).

Early in the year, retired Air Force **Major General Edward Mechenbier** agreed to join our Board of Trustees. General Mechenbier flew F-4C's in Europe and Southeast Asia and in 1967 was shot down over North Vietnam, where he was a prisoner of war for nearly six years. Subsequently, he flew for 16 years for the Ohio Air National Guard and commanded the 162nd Tactical Fighter Squadron at Springfield. Currently, he is a vice president with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC).

In March, our neighbor, **Wright-Dunbar Village**, received word that their proposal for \$6.4 million in streetscape enhancements along West Third Street had been approved, as had a \$70,000 Preserve America grant for the development of a Heritage Connectivity and Implementation Strategy that will demonstrate the economic impact of connecting various cultural heritage sites in the region (including the **Dayton Veterans Affairs Historic District**, which anchors the west end of the Third Street corridor of which Wright-Dunbar is a part).

In early May, we were pleased to see Ohio AMVETS honor their State Commander, **Clay Dailey**, a long-time member of AVHC's board, with a Testimonial Dinner in Dayton.

In May we also unveiled a new and improved website (www.americaveteransheritage.org), showcasing the hard work of our web mistress, **Andrea Foreman**.

Thanks to the hard work of an all-volunteer event planning committee, all eyes in the region were focused on the Dayton VA Medical Center grounds on Memorial Day weekend, as AVHC hosted the second annual **Walk with Giants/Reliving Veterans History** festival. This was the second year for the event, and the first time it has been held on Memorial Day weekend. An estimated 6,000 people attended over three very hot days. Major General Mechenbier presented a great opening speech on Saturday morning. The **Miami Valley Chorale** also sang to the delight of those attending. Displays included both Federal and Confederate Civil War re-enactors (including cavalry!), World War II exhibits, two helicopters and other historical displays. Radio stations WHIO (thanks, **Tommy Collins**) and WCFJ (thanks, **Bill Nance**) each broadcast 3 hours of coverage from the grounds. An Ohio Volksmarch event was also held on Sunday of the event. Thanks to the hard, hard work of everyone who contributed to the success of this event, including, event coordinator **Mark Conrad**, **Nick** and **Jody Sabatino**, the re-enactors from the **35th Ohio Volunteer Infantry** and **Lee's Ranger Cavalry**, the **Red Cross**, **Janet Wagner, RN**, **Ron Patrick RN**, **Dr. Fred Peterson**, **Dennis Carter** and genealogist **Carolyn Burns** to name but a few. The organizing committee is already at work on the 2007 version of the event, which will be called **Memorial Day at "Home"** with its theme: "**Walk with Giants**" and held **May 25-27, 2007**. More information is available on our website, www.AmericanVeteransHeritage.org.

In July, we continued our advocacy for the Dayton Veterans Affairs Historic District by asking the Ohio Historic Preservation Office to oppose a proposal to demolish five pre-1930 staff homes in the District. Thanks to the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act, any federally-funded action that would adversely affect structures within the District must be reviewed by the state historic preservation officer.

On September 29, we had many representatives and friends attend the induction ceremonies for the **Dayton Walk of Fame** honoring **Lewis B. Gunckel** (1826-1903), Dayton attorney and the man most

entitled to be called “father” of the old Central Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, the forerunner of the Dayton VA Medical Center. We had been nominating Gunckel for the award for several years, and were pleased to see him receive the recognition he deserved. Our thanks for biographical assistance go to modern day Dayton lawyer **Merle Wilberding**, whose law firm traces its history back to Gunckel’s day.

Several years ago, we helped to sponsor a memorandum of understanding between the **National Park Service** and the **Department of Veterans Affairs** under which NPS was engaged to conduct an assessment of the significance of the original 11 branches of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers---the first step for possible eventual National Historic Landmark status. After what seemed to us like a long wait, the consultant hired by NPS to conduct the study issued a draft report in October. We took advantage of the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We expect to see a nearly final draft of the report in May of this year.

In a second giant step for our Board development efforts in 2006, United States District Court Judge **Walter H. Rice** joined the Board of Trustees late in the year. Judge Rice has served on the federal bench in Dayton since 1980. His wisdom and experience in the community will serve the organization well.

As has been our tradition in recent years, we wound up the year with a half day strategic planning. retreat. Our December retreat this year was very productive, as we considered our vision statement, reviewed our priorities, reconsidered our Board structure and committees and identified a number of action items. We also reelected all of our current trustees for an additional one year term. In the course of the retreat, we adopted the following formal statement of our vision for the organization:

Our vision is to make our community’s veterans historic district a national treasure and legacy to recognize and honor the service of all American veterans and to promote the healing of mind, body and soul.

At the retreat, we also learned of the resignation of **Daarel Burnette**, our Treasurer and an active member of our Board. We are going to miss Daarel’s advice and counsel, but wish him well as he begins a new job in North Carolina. Luckily for AVHC, however, **Larry Munz** was willing to step into the role of Treasurer. Larry also agreed to serve on our Board. He has a history of helping organizations such as ours with their accounting and treasury functions, and he has continued Daarel’s good work without missing a beat.

Our December retreat also saw the return of an old friend, **Jeff Hull**. While on the administrative staff at the Dayton VA Medical Center, Jeff led the effort to gather, preserve and promote the history of the facility. While he is now working at the VA facility in Marion, Indiana, Jeff has agreed to come on our board and continue to assist us in an advisory capacity.

The end of the year brought us national publicity, as Dayton VA Medical Center’s century and half of service was featured in *Vanguard Magazine*’s November/December 2006 issue in an article by **Darlene Richardson** and Secretary of Veterans Affairs **Jim Nicholson** and his wife **Suzanne** chose a watercolor of the historic Dayton Soldiers Home Chapel (painted by Ms. Nicholson) to adorn their holiday card.

While this report outlines a few of the special events during our year, throughout the year we continued to support a number of ongoing projects. These include participation with our informational display at the state conventions of the various veterans service organizations, participation as a partner with the Library of Congress in the **Veterans History Project**, support for the VA Medical Center’s veterans therapeutic writing group, support for the **Blue Star**

Mothers care package packing parties, provision of information for tours of the historic Dayton campus and many other similar activities.

As always, the organization could not have made it through the year without its many dedicated volunteers. In addition to those who helped with specific projects as described above, we need especially to thank the handful of volunteers whose continuing efforts kept our office and organization going throughout the year, including **Jake Dailey, Gilla Farrell, Jim Fortune** and **Robert Kincses**.

Respectfully submitted

David A. Neuhardt, Secretary

469202