

LOCAL AMERICAN-FRANCO FRIENDSHIP REDISCOVERED DURING D-DAY

This is an insert of part of a copy written by Edith Wycoff for the Locust Valley Leader (1952) about Operation Democracy:

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We felt proud that Operation Democracy was born in Locust Valley and that it has been kept alive largely through the efforts of one of our citizens. (Mrs. Martha Breasted) The beauty of the national organization has been its simplicity. It never has attempted to tell any town how it must organize its affiliation, but rather has acted as an information center and a helping hand...Perhaps, after a time, the Locust Valley unit of Operation Democracy will be revived to action. It seems odd that the idea which was born here among great enthusiasm should have nearly died here while it has grown throughout the country and become a real force in international relations.....Each year Operation Democracy grows stronger as it strikes deep into the imagination of thoughtful men and women everywhere who are unselfishly seeking peace. These are not appeasers or idealists but men and women who know that real peace can only come through understanding of the people who make up the world. They know that exchange of ideas of one good way of accomplishing this...When the idea becomes widespread enough there cannot help but be a better feeling in the world.

REBORN/REKINDLED HERE:

That article was written 60 years ago and our history has been re-sparked and our ancestors would be proud to know it is happening in the hearts of our children and the next generation. Operation Democracy has rekindled the spark of the fire that was started here 65 years ago. The last 5 years the organization of Operation Democracy surfaced as a story to honor our grandparents who started a wonderful organization with its mission to spread the concepts of freedom, democracy and peace through goodwill. Locust Valley adopted a town in Normandy France called Sainte Mere Eglise. This changed history for both villages in many ways and has come full circle today.

June 6th, 1944 will always be marked as a day in history that the world will never forget. This part of WWII history has been known as "Operation Overlord" the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe beginning on the beaches of Normandy. Today in Normandy 68 years later, Normandy still honors the Americans who sacrificed their lives for their freedom and honor their vow "they will never forget". One particular town, Sainte Mere Eglise, France will always be known as the first village liberated during the invasion but will always hold a special place in the hearts of the Locust Valley residents of 1947—this was the town Locust Valley adopted as part of an organization called Operation Democracy. The grass roots efforts of the local residents helped the village to rebuild and give them hope that someone cared. The community of Locust Valley came together in a time of need and spearheaded a campaign to raise money for a small clinic, build roads, and collect clothing and shoes, sent school supplies.

This year during the week long commemorations of D-Day, the Mayor of Sainte Mere Eglise, Marc LeFevre, held a special ceremony on June 3rd, honoring & acknowledging the historic sister city of Locust Valley, New York, for what they did to help Sainte Mere Eglise rebuild. As the church bells rang out through the village marking that mass service ended, the townspeople of SME, dignitaries, WWII Veterans, soldiers and visitors gathered on the town square where a stage was set up with a French flag draped onto a unknown sign to be unveiled.

Mayor LeFevre spoke about history and the importance of preserving it. He gave a brief description about Locust Valley and Operation Democracy and their mission to spread the concepts of freedom, democracy and peace through goodwill. He continued by thanking the community of Locust Valley for their friendship and stated, as part of history the placement of this important marker will define the bond of Locust Valley and Sainte Mere Eglise as Founding historic Sister Cities in 1947. Kaye Weninger, President of the newly rekindled Operation Democracy was there to unveil the new signs that will be proudly displayed at the entrance of this historic village. French Assemblyman Claude Gatignol stood proudly on the stage as the sign was displayed honoring both communities.

As Edith Wycoff hoped that in time the Locust Valley would revive Operation Democracy into action—well it has happened. Over the past 6 years, the community has seen it slowly surfacing with the help of local residents Kaye Weninger and Cathy Soref. Upon learning about the history they have spearheaded to rekindle the charity under the same mission but through the eyes of our children and to educate them to "Never Forget".

The history books that today's student's read can never give an accurate picture of the sacrifices made by previous generations. Hundreds of American Soldiers have served in foreign wars and educating our children – the next gen-



Mayor of Sainte Mere Eglise, Mr. Marc LeFevre, Kaye Weninger, President of Operation Democracy and representative for Locust Valley and Deputy of La Manche Dr. Claude Gatignol in front of new signs that will be at the entrance of the village in Normandy.

eration, how and why so many gave so much to protect the very values and freedoms that we have is important. So, today, Operation Democracy has been working today towards honoring our ancestor's mission. Few of the projects that have come out of the rebirth of Operation Democracy are: the bronze plaque with the History and story of Operation Democracy that honors the village, 9/11 Memorial Garden, Refurbishing of the WWII Monument, Programs during Veterans Day and Memorial Day, Music for Peace (in Thomas Park –Sept. 11th) and Painting for Peace.

This year marks the 2nd annual Art Exhibit called Painting for Peace. The concept was to honor the Veterans & Soldiers of our community and let the students of Locust Valley paint their interpretation of what peace meant. The art work from 44 students were given to be displayed over Memorial Day Weekend at the Gallery in the Plaza Shoppes (Gloria Bethune hosted the event) which 24 pieces were then picked to be taken to Sainte Mere Eglise, France for the first annual International Art Exhibit between the two villages. Tom Camilleri, teacher from the LVHS art dept worked directly with Kaye on this project.

The AVA (Amis des Veterans Americains), which is an association of local volunteers in Normandy that hosts returning veterans and is a huge part of the ceremonies through out the D-Day celebrations, co-sponsored the event. Michelle Coupey a member of the AVA co-chaired the exhibit. Michelle worked

directly with the directors of the Community of Communes and the schools in France. Everyone became excited about the next generation being apart of the ceremonies and agreed that "Painting for Peace" was the perfect way to weave the bond through the past, present and future generations was an exciting concept.

The international art exhibit was scheduled from June 2-6. The walls of the tent were filled with inspiration pieces from the students of the USA and the center was a huge book made from the students of FRANCE. Each panel of the book was made by the different elementary school and told a story about peace. On one wall proudly hung the American and French Flags with the art from one of the local grade school of SME. The artwork was called "reaching out", which displayed the outlines of the kids hands and colorfully filled with drawing and sketches of peace signs, doves, the globe and flags of many nations uniting us as one.

As we often say, a picture paints a thousand words; this art show did just that. The compliments about the art were beyond words of gratitude, one could see it touched everyone who walked into the tent. Kaye commented there were Generals, Dignitaries as well as hundreds of Soldiers, WWII Veterans & their families, tourists and townspeople all came in to see the art. Many commented they saw the sign on the outside of the tent and were curious about what it meant—"Painting for Peace- Student Art Exhibit" then realized it meant just that. Upon seeing the displays people walked out smiling saying, "this is really nice, this is the future, the next generation—then simply said, "thank you". It brought two communities together once 65 years later through the children and with hopes this continues and the next chapter of Operation Democracy will be written.

Kaye noted that the last group of people to come to the tent with a group of 15 German kids and their teachers, who explained they were there to tour the Normandy coast and heard about the art show. They inquired about possibly participating in next years art exhibit—bringing the circle to a close—France-America- Germany, through the next generation – PEACE.

