

people to know

FLYING FIRST CLASS

Taking veterans to and from Washington to visit the National World War II Memorial is an honor for a Peoria area fabricator.

MARGARET HANLEY enjoys flying.

But not just for business and vacation.

Hanley is the cofounder and vice president—as well as promoter, fundraiser, accountant and any other role that needs filling—for Greater Peoria Honor Flight. Honor Flight is a national program dedicated to bringing American war veterans to visit their respective memorials in Washington, D.C. The primary focus is on World War II veterans, and the goal is to have as many remaining vets as possible visit the National World War II Memorial during their lifetimes. From there, the hope is to provide the same service for Korean War and Vietnam War veterans, then veterans of subsequent conflicts.

Hanley, the president of A. Lucas and Sons in Peoria, Ill. (an AISC member and certified fabricator), decided to start the Greater Peoria chapter or “hub”—one of more than 130 local hubs across the country—in 2013. She had been involved in the nearby Springfield hub since 2010, but her mother’s passing in 2009 sparked the idea for a hub in Peoria.

“When my mother passed away in 2009, we asked for donations to be made in her memory to the Honor Flight network,” recalls Hanley. “For the next few years, I thought about starting a hub in Peoria. I was talking with one of my mother’s friends in early January of this year about Honor Flight, and together we decided that we were going to start the Greater Peoria hub in memory of my mother.” A few months later the hub was born, and its initial flight took place this past June.

“We had almost no corporate sponsors for our first flight,” says Hanley, who spends 10 to 15 hours per week of her time on Honor Flight duties. “It was dimes and dollars to get the plane in the sky on June 4. As we’ve gained awareness, however, many local businesses have stepped in to help.”

The flights cost around \$80,000 each and are made pos-

sible through private donations; there is no government funding. Veterans are located through American Legion and VFW chapters as well as Veterans Affairs offices. Trip lengths vary by hub, and the Greater Peoria hub’s trips last one day—typically leaving at 6:30 a.m. and returning by 9:30 p.m. via charter plane. There are about 80 vets per flight, each assigned a “guardian,” who serves as their escort for the day.

Their second and most recent flight took place on September 24, the week before the government shutdown (many veterans still traveled to the capital via various Honor Flight hubs during the shutdown and were able to visit the memorial, even though it was technically closed). The impact of the flights is just as powerful on the volunteers as it is on the veterans.

“Honor Flight changes lives. I can think of nothing more powerful than having a 95-year-old veteran look you in the eye and thank you for giving him the second-best day of his life after his wedding day.”

Hanley, who started with A. Lucas in 2004 as vice president and has been the company’s president since 2005, grew up just a few minutes away from the shop. Her father and grandfather were both longtime employees of the company—retiring as president and shop foreman, respectively—and she notes that she learned everything she knows about the steel business from her father, whom she would accompany to the shop on weekends from a very young age (one of her high school jobs was running blueprints for the shop engineers). The “soft” skills of running a business, she says, came from her mother, who served as the company’s vice president.

After college, Hanley spent several years in banking and finance but eventually decided to come back to the family business, first returning to school to earn a construction degree. Her father started her in the shop so that she could earn the respect of the ironworkers.

“The first time I held a welding torch, I was 10 years old,” she says. “The first time I knew what a stack of dimes was and how to lay one, I was 32 years old! I got into steel fabrication for one reason: Every day I saw my father go to work with passion, love and a smile on his face,” she says. “I wanted the same things for myself.”

And Hanley is just as committed to the achievements of her family and company as she is to those of the veterans she serves via Honor Flight.

“I grew up with steel running through my veins,” she says. “My grandfather and father dedicated their lives to the company, and I intend to make sure that their labors are not lost on those carrying on their legacy.”

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To learn more about Honor Flight and Greater Peoria Honor Flight, visit www.honorflight.org and www.greaterpeoriahonorflight.org.



◀ Honor Flight veteran Richard Etter, Margaret Hanley and guardian Thomas Williams, Jr.