

The Detroit News

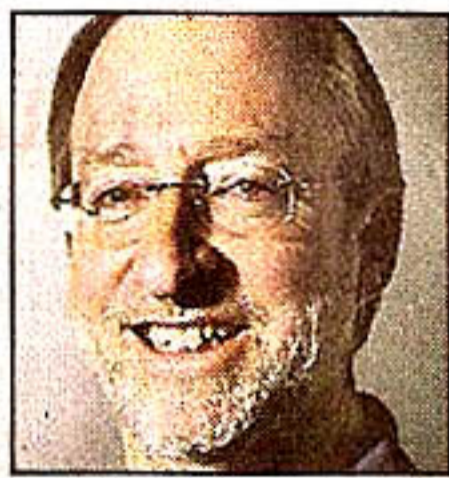
Tuesday, July 14, 2009

Metro Final

Image captures 720 vets

Film to feature Michigianians who fought in WWII

I love this photo. I love knowing that 720 World War II veterans from Michigan, all in their 80s and 90s, assembled for it six weeks ago at Willow Run Airport. I love knowing that 400 of them regrouped in various locations afterward to sign it.



NEAL RUBIN

I love knowing that the White House has taken an interest in it, even if it's unclear whether President Barack Obama will receive his copy while he's in Warren today. And I hate knowing that two of the men who posed have since died — but that's one of the reasons I love this photo.

"We see these feeble guys having a hard time walking, or they're carrying oxygen tanks," says Keith Famie, 49. "When they were 19, they were flying bombing missions or parachuting behind enemy lines."

Famie, the chef-turned-filmmaker, is producing a documentary called "Detroit: Our Greatest Generation." It's about the men and women who left Detroit and went out and won the war, but it's also about the people who stayed behind and made this the Arsenal of Democracy.

It's budgeted at \$300,000, and he's so far removed from that figure that he spent Friday and Saturday at an art fair in Plymouth hawking T-shirts. He made \$700.

Then on Sunday, one of Obama's staffers sent him an e-mail. State Rep. Alma Wheeler Smith, D-Salem, and U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, have been lobbying hard to put a poster-sized reproduction of the picture and signatures in Obama's hands. For one thing, he should have it, and for another, it might shake loose some sponsorships.

Deadlines will be tight Tuesday, the staffer said, but it's a definite maybe. And if today doesn't work out, at least Famie knows the film is on the presidential radar screen. He can't really afford to fly the poster to Washington, D.C., but if the chance arises, he'll go sell some more T-shirts.

They're available at www.detroit-greatestgeneration.com, along with some film clips.

"Shame on us," Famie says, "if we can't find a way to tell this story."

It's not just that there won't be a better time. If he can't do it now, there might not be any time at all.

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(This section contains a list of names and signatures of the 720 veterans who posed for the photo.)



Robert Hassan

The original 4- by 6-foot version of this poster will hang at the Yankee Air Museum.