

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

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Catching The Spirit

national renewal to remind America of the values and accomplishments of the generation who endured the hard times of the Great Depression, fought to defeat the greatest tyranny in history, and then went on to rebuild their shattered world in an unprecedented effort to help assure a better future for both friend and former foe alike.

The following is Mr. Hegg's story.

KEEPING THE SPIRIT OF '45 ALIVE

BY WARREN C. HEGG

Occasionally I will be inviting guest columnists to submit timely and important articles that may be of interest to FMCA members. This month's guest writer is Warren C. Hegg, national director for Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive.

Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative to

Auston and Bonnie O'Neill, F440372, of Centreville, Virginia, are on a mission. For the next two years they will be traveling throughout the United States in their motorhome to rekindle the spirit of America's "Greatest Generation."

and rebuilt the postwar world. It is observed on the second Sunday in August, aligning with the anniversary of August 14, 1945 — the day spontaneous celebrations broke out across America at the news that the most destructive war in history was over.

"The World War II generation understood the importance of coming together during difficult times," said Auston, whose father was a decorated combat infantryman during the war. "We need to revive their spirit of courage, shared sacrifice, 'can do' attitude, service to community, and responsibility to one another to help us meet the challenges of our own time."

Auston knows something about courage and sacrifice: last year he underwent cancer surgery and completed the last of 37 radiation treatments on the day he and Bonnie boarded their motorhome and set off on their journey across America. Their son, Auston Jr., was deployed to Afghanistan the same day.

"By remembering how our nation welcomed home the troops at the end of World War II, we are reminded how important it is to support the men and women who are returning today," Bonnie said. "Keeping the spirit of '45 alive means making sure they are able to successfully transition back to civilian life."

Since leaving Virginia in early February 2014, the O'Neills have logged more than 25,000 miles, visiting communities in 37 states, and are receiving requests to appear in major parades and other public events around the country. Their

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"We need to honor the legacy of our Greatest Generation by keeping their spirit alive."

preserve the legacy of the men and women of the Greatest Generation who were involved in World War II efforts. Their example of courage, self-sacrifice, "can do" attitude, and commitment to community can help to inspire a renewal of national unity in America at a time when our country once again must come together to meet historic challenges.

The goal of the Keep The Spirit Of '45 Alive initiative is to honor an annual day of remembrance and

The O'Neills are part of a nationwide nonprofit, nonpartisan grassroots initiative called Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive, which led Congress in 2010 to unanimously establish a national Spirit of '45 Day honoring the men and women of the World War II generation.

Spirit of '45 Day provides an opportunity for Americans to draw inspiration from the generation that endured the hardships of the Great Depression, preserved freedom and democracy in World War II,

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goal is to continue to travel throughout the United States during the next 18 months to help build public awareness about the events that will be taking place in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. The celebration will kick off in New York City's Times Square on August 14, 2015.

"We have to work quickly to get the word out, because our veterans and the women who served as Rosie the Riveters on the homefront are rapidly passing away," said Auston, who is in his own race against time after learning that his cancer has spread to his lymph nodes.

Auston has recruited more than 1,000 buglers to participate with him in a round-the-world wreath-laying ceremony that is being organized by the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the O'Neills will be participating in the cross-country convoy of military vehicles that will be traveling from Washington, D.C., to San Diego, California, next year. Other events include 1940s-style community picnics featuring swing band music, re-enactors, and flyovers by vintage World War II aircraft.

The O'Neills have been relying on individual donations and are looking for sponsors to help defray the costs of their tour. They also are hoping that a manufacturer can replace their aging Fleetwood with a newer model, in which they can interview and record people with memories of August 14, 1945. (Discussions also are under way regarding the tour being featured in



its own reality show next year.)

FMCA members are invited to help Auston and Bonnie as they continue on their journey around America. To see the O'Neills' latest itinerary, visit www.spiritof45.org.

"We welcome the support of FMCA and know that many members will want to join us as together we honor the members of the Greatest Generation in our families and communities," said Auston, who proudly displays photos of his father and mother on the sides of the Spirit of '45 Day Express. He and Bonnie are encouraging other baby boomers to do the same by putting veterans' photos on their motorhomes.

A Spirit of '45 Day 70th Anniversary decal is available for donations of \$45 or more. Donations can be made online at www.spiritof45.org; by phone at (877) 814-1945; or by mail to Spirit of '45, 55 Broad St., LL, New York, NY 10004.

"This is an opportunity for all of

The Spirit of '45 RV Express appeared in the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C., as part of an entry with 250 youth carrying photos of men and women who served and died in World War II. Auston O'Neill played taps during a pre-parade ceremony at the U.S. Navy Memorial.

America to come together to celebrate a time when our country was truly a community and everyone felt they were connected," Bonnie said. "We need to honor the legacy of our Greatest Generation by keeping their spirit alive."

FMCA OBSERVES INDEPENDENCE DAY

The FMCA national office will be closed Friday, July 4, in observance of the Independence Day holiday. Mail Forwarding subscribers with last names beginning with M-Z will have mail forwarded on Thursday, July 3.

For our Canadian members, happy Canada Day on July 1. For our members in the United States, happy Independence Day on July 4.

Have a safe holiday, and safe travels to all. **FMC**