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Gathering honors Vietnam veterans

BY JIM TOTTEN • DAILY PRESS & ARGUS • JULY 25, 2010

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A candlelight serenade of "Amazing Grace" made for a touching tribute to the more than 2,500 Michigan Vietnam War veterans who never returned home.

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A crowd of 170 residents gathered at Crystal Gardens banquet center in Genoa Township on Thursday evening for the tribute, which was a fundraiser for filmmaker Keith Famie's documentary about the state's Vietnam veterans. Famie said a young woman sang in the dark banquet hall to mark the passing of 2,645 soldiers from Michigan who died in the Vietnam War.

He said Michigan had double the number of fatalities in Vietnam than other states.

Famie said the moment gave the audience time to reflect on those soldiers who weren't able to come back home and continue their lives with their families. The Michigan Vietnam Veteran Traveling Memorial was on display during the event.

"Those aren't just names there; those are people," Famie said. "Those are people who never had a chance to have a life."

Famie, a 50-year-old Novi resident, is working on a film about Vietnam veterans, and it includes interviews with several Livingston County residents. He decided to make the film when he realized how Vietnam veterans were helping and supporting aging soldiers from World War II. Last year, he completed a film about Michigan's World War II veterans.

During the evening, local World War II veterans Jack Pickett and Donald Burgett received certificates and a standing ovation.

Famie has stated Vietnam veterans helped build our communities, and yet received little recognition for what they did during one of the longest, most difficult conflicts.

"In a nutshell, they deserve (this film)," he stated.

Famie said there are wonderful stories revealed in his film about what people went through back then and what they're doing now.

He's planning to hold another fundraiser in August in Rochester to help finance his film.

While he had hoped for a larger turnout, Famie said he was pleased with crowd who attended.

"It was a tremendously patriotic evening," he said.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Jim Totten at (517) 548-7088 or at jtotten@gannett.com.



After the viewing of a trailer for a documentary filmed in Michigan titled "Our Vietnam Generation," people attending a benefit dinner at Crystal Gardens banquet center in Genoa Township participated in a candlelight vigil. In the foreground are, from far left, Michael Bowen, Pat and Doug Schneider and Kenn Barrett. (Photo by GILLIS BENEDICT/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)



Michael Bowen, foreground, participates in a candlelight vigil after the Thursday viewing of the trailer of a documentary film titled "Our Vietnam Generation." (Photo by GILLIS BENEDICT/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)

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