Wide variety of items are on display at Legion museum

Moira K. McGhee
news@reidnewspapers.com

Military history enthusiasts or anyone interested in military memorabilia will find helmets, hand grenades, uniforms, medals, propaganda and much more at the American Legion Military Museum at 2129 Denver Harner Drive.

The collection includes artifacts from the Civil War all the way through current conflicts. Many of the guns, ammunition and other items displayed are the real deal and donated by local veterans, but a few items are replicas.

Mike Headlee, the current historian and a past commander of American Legion Post 147, frequently guides tours through the museum.

Headlee was an Air Force Security Policeman with the 7th Air Force in Vietnam.

He explained that there are authentic guns on display and in the gun room, so they keep both areas securely locked up and alarmed.

"The guns in our gun room are the ones we use for funeral details," said Headlee. "We still have funeral details, but not as much because most of us are getting too old. We need to attract some younger members. Most of those guys doing funeral detail, the youngest one is probably 72, and the rest run clear up into their 90s."

The original museum opened in 2015. Headlee said Legion member Glenn Pitts started the museum. Pitts used to be the Historian and still gives tours at 96 years old, when his knees are up to it. He served during World War II as what was later referred to as a frogman.

"They'd swim in close to the land and blow-up stuff that would keep the ships from coming in," Headlee said of Pitts' time in the service. "He said he'd dive, then take a breath of air, and [they'd] be up there shooting at him with bullets hitting all around you. Somebody asked him, 'Mr. Pitts, how'd you get that job?' He said 'cuz I could hold my breath a long time,' so he got volunteered."

• Please see **Museum**, Page 5

Museum

• Continued from Page 1

The bulk of the museum didn't exist until a recently completed expansion more than doubled the exhibit space. The expansion was made possible through the generosity of J-M Farms.

"The museum previously only had the little section up front," explained Headlee. "Every year, J-M Farms has a golf tournament, and they give money to somebody that needs it. They heard about our museum and they came over and built this whole section for us. This used to just be one big open garage. They did the wiring, air conditioning, everything."

The newer section houses separate display areas for each branch of the military, including the women's corps, often called the nursing corps. There's also a remembrance wall for deceased veterans. Residents are encouraged to bring in a framed photo of a deceased relative who was a veteran to add to the wall.

There's another wall dedicated to Miamians who perished during the Vietnam War. Headlee said he's missing a photo for this wall. He'd really like to add a photo of Tom Robison, Class of 1966, if anyone has one.

While the museum contains a fantastic collection of military memorabilia, the Legion gladly accepts and will proudly display military-related items anyone would like to donate. Tours of the museum are currently by appointment only.

Anyone interested in taking a tour can call Mike at 918-542-1132, Glenn at 918-542-3255 or Martha at 972-768-9189.

They can also stop by the Disabled American Veterans office, housed within the American Legion, on Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and they'll contact someone to open the museum.