

GV vet wants to honor firefighters

Retired Lt. Col. Frank Sartanowicz's birthday is Sept. 11

By Mike Touzeau
Green Valley News

Retired Lt. Col. Frank Sartanowicz, a former P-61 Black Widow night fighter pilot in WWII and intelligence officer in Korea, a hard himself (though he'd never say that), wants to thank local firefighters on his birthday Sept. 11, in memory of their fallen comrades and those who survived New York's twin-tower tragedy.

He hopes others will want to stand alongside him.

"My wife and I were thinking about what we could do to honor them on the anniversary of 9-11. We know how appreciative folks in Green Valley are of our firefighters."

He's going to prepare one of his famous smoked turkeys at the Abrego firehouse [Green Valley Fire Station 153]. Alongside yams and Boston baked beans, his wife Betty Jane will be baking pies for dessert.

He'd like to have more people out there who feel the same as he does to volunteer, since he originally wanted to prepare dinners for all three stations, but can only do one by himself.



Frank Sartanowicz

Cooks needed

He figures it would only take a couple of seven- or eight-person crews to cook and serve and clean up.

"People kind of forget, so I thought if I tell my story of wanting to do something for them, maybe others will get enthused about it, too. It's a way for an individual to participate in honoring them."

An Elk himself, he's already enlist their help to make it an annual affair, and already has a commitment from Bashas' to provide some of the food, but feels it's a great chance for Green Valley residents, many of whom have consistently praised the efforts of local firefighters and paramedics, to pitch in.

"It's a more personal way to show our gratitude than a ceremony and a bunch of speeches," said the 81-year-old Air Force veteran who, as the youngest pilot at 19 in the 425th Squadron in Western Europe, flew 65 missions for over 13 months, specializing in the neutralization of enemy train and convoy movements overnight, as well as stalking the infamous German V1 rockets. Sartanowicz won nine air medals and a Bronze Star in Korea.

He grew up in Massachusetts only a half block from a fire station, even did a little forest firefighting himself with the Civilian Conservation Corps before the war.

Admired firefighters

"My friends and I used to get to slide down the fire pole every time the alarm rang," he remembers, never forgetting how much he admired them.

He carried those memories with him into combat, never seeking any credit for it, like most in his generation.

"You did what you were told," he said humbly.

"You didn't know any better." And, no one will ever know how many Allied lives he saved by knocking out troop and equipment movements before they reached the front.

Maybe it's part of the reason he wants to recognize the similar courage and sacrifice of those firefighters and paramedics at 9-11 by making this gesture at the Green Valley station.

"I know they're planning a big ceremony in Tucson," he said, "but this is just a small way we can do something here."

"I invite any GVR clubs or local civic organizations, or individuals, to join my wife and me."

Sometimes little acts of heroism are just as important as any, so if anyone out there wants to lend a hand, they can reach Frank Sartanowicz at 625-5913.

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