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Funding needed for visit by LST

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By Jessica Fink, jfink@qconline.com

Quad-Citians won't experience a landing ship tank, or LST, the way Coal Valley resident George White, 82, did during World War II. But they'll still get a chance to tour one this fall.

LSTs were flat-bottomed amphibious vessels often used during WWII to transport soldiers and tanks onto enemy beaches. Of the 1,050 vessels that were built, LST-325 moored in Evansville, Ind., is the last one still in working condition.

This August, Quad-Citians can tour LST-325 when it docks for a week along the Mississippi River on Ben Butterworth Parkway at River Drive and 25th Street in Moline.

Mr. White' service on LST-884 was short-lived, but it made a lasting impression on him.

"I was only on for three weeks but I became fascinated with it," said Mr. White who served in the Marine Corps. "This may have been the most important ship in the Navy. How would we have ever landed on those Pacific Islands without it? This kind of ship was just vital.

"We were six miles off the shores at Okinawa when we were hit by a suicide plane," said Mr. White. "After it hit we caught fire and were ordered to abandon ship.

"We jumped, and most of us were in the water for about an hour before other ships picked us up."

Built in 1942, LST-325 measures 50 feet wide and 329 feet long -- nearly the length of a football field. Active during the invasions at Gela, Sicily and Salerno, Italy, it carried 59 vehicles, 31 officers and 408 soldiers on its first trip to Omaha Beach during the D-Day invasion.

"There's a lot of history to this ship," said Coal Valley resident Don Chapman, 81, who sailed on a similar ship in World War II. "In 1944 it saved 400 people from drowning when another ship was torpedoed."

In 1944, Mr. Chapman was 17 years old when he enlisted in the Navy. He and Mr. White were part of "28 stubborn old men" responsible for retrieving the LST from Greek Crete and sailing it back to the United States, although Mr. White only made part of the six-month trip.

Since 2003, LST-325 has toured various U.S. riverfront locations, operating on income from public admission and assistance from cities where it stops. More than 30,000 people toured LST-325 when it stopped in Peoria last year.

Milt Hand, director of Moline Parks and Recreation, worked with Mr. Chapman to bring it to the Quad-Cities. He expects a good turnout and said the event will likely generate "room nights" in Quad-City hotels.

Moline Parks and Recreation requested \$5,000 from the city's hotel/motel budget to help buy the necessary docking materials, like gangplanks and spud barges, which help anchor the ship. The funding decision goes to council tonight.

"It's a unique ship and kind of a working museum of that era," Mr. Hand said.

Comments

7 comments on this article

Posted by some anonymous person from **Rock Island** at 11:07PM on Monday, 4/21/08

This is really cool. My grandpa was on an LST in WWII and I love history myself, so I think this is a unique opportunity to see firsthand what my grandpa did during the war. I think it is fitting that he will be able to step on one of his old ships and tell his kids us grandkids what it was really like.

Posted by **Viet Nam Vet** from **East Moline** at 6:49AM on Tuesday, 4/22/08

The LST's were still in use during Viet Nam.

Our Squadron of patrol boats was supported by an LST in the Gulf of Thailand.

We were stationed at a Viet Nameese Navy yard, but our heavy repair shop was the LST 3-5 miles off shore.

We got out there once or twice a week for a hot meal, a shower, and a semi-real bed.

We were very glad to have the LST there.

Posted by **D** from **QC** at 9:21AM on Tuesday, 4/22/08

I hope the city council approves the funding. It's really exciting to have such an important piece of history visit the area.

Posted by **navy vet** from **Rock Island** at 7:50PM on Tuesday, 4/22/08

The funding should be no problem, but it should not come from the taxpayers. If there really is enough interest in bringing it here, then advance ticket sales should be more than enough to cover the costs. If it costs \$5,000, then just do the math. 2,000 people buy tickets at \$2.50 each, and you've got the thing covered. There are certainly a lot of veteran's groups that would also like to pitch in. I was in the Navy, and I'd buy several tickets for friends and family to have the experience. In fact, maybe some of the local vets groups could sell the tickets and use it as a fundraiser! They could set up a refreshment stand on shore and have vets to talk to about their experiences on these ships. Heck, I'd buy a ticket just to hear some of their stories!

Posted by **Mike** from **Moline** at 8:05PM on Tuesday, 4/22/08

I would like to see the LST come here, but it would not be appropriate to have the city pay \$5,000 for it. City budgets are already tight, we don't want to make things worse.

This is really something that should be in the hands of the vets. I belong to a local American Legion. Several of us talked it over, and we are ready able, and willing to take care of this. I a sure there are other vetera's groups that would like to participate. We can't speak for everybody, but just among us, we should have more than enough to cover the costs. We are all ready to pitch in with both our time and money to make this happen. We can always count on a lot of volunteers. This should not be handled from city funding. We believe that It would also be more meaningful as a salute to vets if the vets handled it rather than the city.

Posted by **semper fil** from **Silvis** at 8:45PM on Tuesday, 4/22/08

I hope the city says no to funding this, but I love the idea of having an LST here. It should be handled by the veterans who were actually involved as much as possible. It just doesn't seem right to have this take a \$5,000 chunk out of the taxpayers pockets.

Let the veteran's groups have this as a project to use as an opportunity to raise funds for other local vet functions. We could have local veterans provide historical programs on the history involved with the LSTs. A concession stand and souvenirs could also be used to cover the costs of bringing it here. Local vets could be involved in telling their stories. There are several local vets groups that would love to get involved here. Viet Nam Vets, American Legion, VFW, etc. We might even use the opportunity to hold raffles, sell tickets, sell postcards, and sell programs, etc. My brother served on an LST and he loves to talk about it. If this project is really worthwhile, then the public will support it without using city funds.

Maybe it could be docked somewhere that there is a large building nearby where seminars and other veteran's events could be held. (Behind the Mark or TGI Fridays, or perhaps elsewhere?)

Posted by **Larry** from **Moline** at 2:52AM on Wednesday, 4/23/08

Some of the other postings here are right on about the funding. The money should not come from the city. If there really is enough interest in bringing the LST here, then the funds should come from those who visit it. When I go out to a restaurant, I don't expect them to let me eat, and then hand the bill to the person at the next the next table. This visit could really be a boon to veteran's groups, and using it as a fundraiser is just a common sense approach.

To our city council members- if you really care about our veterans, please don't use any city funds on this!