



Cortland Acres resident Vincent F. DiBacco wins statewide 'Remember Me' Award

Cortland Acres resident Vincent DiBacco received the "Remember Me" award, which was presented by the West Virginia Health Care Association during a special ceremony at the state Capitol in Charleston.

Numerous Cortland officials, family and friends joined DiBacco for the Feb. 27 event, as did local members of our legislative delegation. Among his friends attending were Tom and Betty DiBacco, Lori Phillips, Allison Phillips, Emily Phillips, Lori DiBacco, Mr. & Mrs. John DiBacco, Michael DiBacco, Ryan DiBacco, and Kim Clevenger. Longtime friend Jim Rubenstein, the current state corrections commissioner, also attended the ceremony.

At one point 9-year-old Allison put her arm around Vincent's neck and told him how proud she was of him, and 7-year-old Ryan, after touring the Capitol building, wondered why his great-uncle's picture wasn't hanging in the halls alongside the state's past governors.

DiBacco is the fifth Cortland Acres resident to receive the "Remember Me" award in the past five years. He joins Betty Swantek, Danny Ringer, Solena Massi and Champ Sedmock.

"Everyone at Cortland Acres is special," Administrator Don Black said. "It's wonderful to have yet another of our residents honored on a statewide basis."

Patrick Kelly, CEO of the West Virginia Health Care Association, honored DiBacco and just four other residents from long-term care facilities around West Virginia.

Following is the nomination submitted by Marie Grafton, activities director at Cortland Acres.

Why did Vincent DiBacco live when so many others died? That is a frequent question asked by this Army Sergeant who was a survivor of D-Day on the Omaha Beach at Normandy.

Vincent, or “Bugs” as he is affectionately called by friends and family, said he will never forget the stench of blood from that day as the sea was so red. He watched as his best friend was no more. As he and the troops attempted to advance, they were time and again hit with all types of artillery. The Nazis held such a stronghold that the Allies could only move laterally creating much loss of life and limbs.

Vincent and the other living troops spent several harrowing days – it was like a living hell. The details of that historic day are still so very vivid in his mind that when he has shared in recent years with the boys at the Rubenstein Juvenile Center they are riveted to the bleachers and you can hear a pin drop. The staff at the Center tell about how this is the best history lesson the boys ever receive.

Vincent was raised in Thomas, and was studying at St. Charles Seminary in Baltimore, Md., for the priesthood when he felt compelled to sign up for the Army as his patriotic duty. All the carnage was very difficult for this gentle spirit, who was preparing for a peaceful occupation. After receiving a citation for a Bronze Star Medal and an honorable discharge from his medic duties following WWII, Vincent returned home and did not realize what was going on as he experienced depression and uncertainty with his future.

So many visions from the war still ravaged his thoughts and dreams. Therefore, he bypassed his previous educational endeavors, working at his family’s service station/garage pumping gas, assisting in the Varsity Sports Restaurant, and working for a cousin’s grocery store. He also continued to be active in his home church St. Thomas Aquinas, where he has been an altar boy, Lector, Eucharistic Minister, and Sacristan for his church over the years. In addition, he has participated or assisted with the American Legion, Knights of Columbus, Catholic War Veterans, Catholic Youth groups, the Thomas Volunteer Fire Department, and the local nursing home volunteer group.

His church has been and still is the hub of his wheel. Even today Vincent, who is 91 years old, is in church when the doors are open and the weather is passable.

It was several years after World War II, when Vincent could not shake the depression that enveloped his life, that he was diagnosed with PTSD. It was a relief for this

“gentle” man who was so traumatized by the sights, sounds, and smells he experienced especially on D-Day.

In spite of all the horrors of war, Vincent continues to have a compassionate heart and a beautiful wry sense of humor. He goes to visit several Cortland Acres residents daily and is very kind and caring. Though he never married, he has many nieces and nephews and even great-nieces and nephews that he prays for by name each and every day. His life today includes lots of soul soothing classical music, plays, and cheering for WVU. There is nothing like a WVU victory to sooth the soul of a huge Mountaineer fan!

Through all the trauma of war, Vincent has remained a gentleman’s gentleman, a man of presence, and someone who commands respect. His Bronze Star Medal citation states that he performed his tasks in an exceptional manner with a high degree of initiative and resourcefulness in obtaining medical supplies and administering first aid to the wounded.

Following the war he struggled with the question “Why did I live,” and day by day, year by year, Vincent developed meaning and purpose to his life by nurturing a strong spiritual life and giving to others. Has his life been easy? No! Has it been worth it? Yes!

Vincent’s commitment and contributions to his family and local community since WWII are a testament to a life that is overcoming adversity daily. Did you wonder about the nickname “Bugs”? It didn’t come from Bugs Bunny, but from a nickname that evolved from Junior to June Bug to just plain ole “Bugs.”