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CONTACT: Kevin Farkas
Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Initiative®
412.423.8034 | Kevin@VeteranVoicesofPittsburgh.com
<http://VeteranVoicesofPittsburgh.com>



LOCAL NONPROFIT GIVES STUDENTS A CHANCE TO PRESERVE VETERANS' ORAL HISTORIES

PITTSBURGH, PA – April 2013 – The Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Initiative is a local nonprofit that has begun working with schools throughout Western Pennsylvania to give kids a chance to meet local veterans and to preserve their stories of military service. .

Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh is dedicated to capturing, preserving, and sharing the experiences of Pittsburgh area veterans of all branches of service and eras, including peace and war-time service. Its newly launched *Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Education Program* teaches high school and middle school children about oral history and gives students an opportunity to interview actual veterans.

“The oral history process is a powerful way to realize that all veterans have remarkable stories of patriotism, sacrifice, and bravery, said Kevin Farkas, a Navy veteran and co-founder of Veteran Voices. “Veterans have fascinating stories of fear and loneliness, confusion, boredom, mundane duties, life-long friendships, humor, and exotic travel. To fully understand and appreciate veterans' experiences, students need to hear these stories for themselves.”

The *Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Education Program* is a customizable, experiential educational activity that supports a wide range of Pennsylvania-specific academic standards in history; geography; civics and government; reading, writing, speaking and listening skills; and intrapersonal skills as well. “We present oral history as an academic research tool, of course, but we also demonstrate how it is a humanizing activity,” said Farkas, himself a former university educator. “Story-telling and story-listening is a deeply personal experience; it is a social, psychological, and emotional encounter. We want students to think critically about history and to understand historical context, but we also want them to experience and understand the power of first-person historical narratives.”

Also presenting the program is Todd DePastino, Ph.D., cultural and military historian and author of such books as, *Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front* and *Citizen Hobo: How a Life of Homelessness Shaped America*. Dr. DePastino also teaches history at Waynesburg University and Penn State.

“So many veterans long to tell their stories, and they're always delighted to work with young people,” said Dr. DePastino, who recruits and screens veteran volunteers through *The Veterans Breakfast Club*—another nonprofit organization that he directs. “So many of our veterans have gone through amazing experiences—some horrifying events. Yet they are just wonderful storytellers who know how to tell age-appropriate stories. These are history lessons that students can't learn from books,” said Dr. DePastino.

Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh is currently working with high school students at the Winchester Thurston School, a nationally recognized private college preparatory school located in Pittsburgh, PA. Students there are interviewing and recording the stories of veterans from the WW II, Korean, and the Vietnam eras. Their oral history interviews will be presented publicly later this year.

To learn more about the *Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Education Program* and how area schools can apply, please contact Kevin Farkas.

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