

Artful Thinking
Looking Back at Lodi during WWII

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The people who lived in Lodi during the thick of WWII look back on those trying times with mixed emotions. The fears, the sacrifices and the losses haunt them still, even as I write this some 56 years later.

While anxious mothers were sending their 18 year old sons off to defend our country, the entire community rallied together in the face of despair and contributed unselfishly to the war effort.

The possibility of losing their freedom was a harsh reality and one that they courageously dealt with on a daily basis. The very thought of defeat was alien to them. So they molded our nation into the most formidable war machine that the world has ever known. So urgent was this common cause, that the impact being made on the homefront was felt by our fighting men and women overseas.

All facets of our community were involved in this noble quest. So it was the responsibility of each citizen to take an active and meaningful part in preserving the "American Dream."

In 1942, the Lodi Memorial Library did its part in the war effort by leading a drive to get 200 books to those in service. The drive, a nationwide project, was called the "Victory Book Campaign." The people of Lodi were asked to donate their favorite books to the cause and were urged to "give a book that it hurts to give." Also, during those lengthy war years, Mr. Lawrence Tuscano, Chairman of the Defense Council First Aid Department, held weekly life-saving courses at the Wilson School. His instructors were Dr. Peter la Barber, Dr. Luis Spicola and Dr. Joseph McGuire. Lodi residents were preparing themselves for a state of emergency, while, in their hearts, they were striving for nothing short of victory.

Lodi's first woman to serve in the military, the WAACS, was Miss Josephine Lombardo, a member of the Mayor's Service Committee. The town gave her a farewell wish luncheon that was hosted by Katherine Schiaffo and Katherine Micklas. Wilson School presented Miss Lombardo with a travel bag on behalf of the community.

As was the rest of the country, the town of Lodi was finding strength in unity. With strength came action, and our Borough threw into the war effort all that they could muster and dug in for more. Vincent C. Focarino, publisher of the Lodi Bulletin, wrote in his editorial in 1942: "Now as

never before, there is a need for coordination and cooperation. People of Lodi must immediately unite in organizing a smooth working defense of our community and our nation.”

With that came a dynamic pursuit of victory and daily personal sacrifices. The people of Lodi rose to the occasion and were first in everything from War Bond sales to Victory Gardens.

Lodi’s first casualty of WWII was a 47 year old Navy man by the name of Cornelius De Vries of 85 James Street. According to a letter from the War Department, he died a hero’s death while attempting a rescue during the Pearl Harbor attack of a soldier who had been overcome by lethal gas on board ship. Reported missing in action was a 23 year old sailor by the name of Frank Joseph Hurban, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hurban Sr. of 115 Autumn Street .

Lodi WWII veterans are quick to remind me that the heroes--the real heroes-- never came home. Ah...but they did, since the brave men and women who fought beside them carried them back to American soil in their hearts. One can say that indeed the heroes did come home after all!

The following is a poem that was written by Private John Paladino while serving in Europe. It was printed in the *Lodi Messenger* in January 1943.

The Home Front

by Private John Paladino (1943)

This war is ours
We cannot lose.
If we stick together fate plays our hands
And we cannot choose.

You have a job to execute
Don’t falter
Those fiends we aim to prosecute!
Their dictates we shall alter.

This shall be a world of peace.
Our joy will share no sorrow.
All gloom and misery shall cease
For us and those that follow.

The darkest night will seem aglow,
With lights that dress the city
And in our hearts we'll make a vow
To help the poor we pity.

A mother needn't have the fear
Of droning planes above her
It's on a mission of good cheer
No need for under cover.

A peaceful world, a joyous heart
A family near to love you.
Never again shall we depart
Our dreams will have come true!