

# Operation Democracy

## Locust Valley Ambassador to Sainte-Mere-Eglise

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Both America and France celebrate their freedom from tyranny in July, our nation on the 4th, France on Bastille Day, the 14th. celebrated, however, are even closer to home. Locust Valley and Sainte-Mere-Eglise, France, the first city liberated on D-Day during yet another struggle for freedom from tyranny, became sister cities only a few years after the war ended; and the flame of a once-dormant relationship has been reignited in recent years.

Last month, soon after Operation Democracy, a Locust Valley-based organization founded in 1947 to help the town of Sainte-Mere-Eglise in Normandy, held an exhibition of art works by 44 Locust Valley High School students on the weekend of the anniversary of D-Day, Kay Weninger and Cathy Soref, its president and vice-president, respec-

tively, visited the French village for a unique international art show, Paintings for Peace. They brought with them 24 selected works from the Locust Valley show, works which would be exhibited with those of French students at an outdoor reception attended by Sainte-Mere-Eglise Mayor Marc LeFevre.

Ms. Weninger presented the mayor with a citation from Nassau County Legislator Delia DeRiggi-Whitton. Both the French and American flags were displayed during the reception and art exhibit, which took place over a period of several days.

A sign donated by Operation Democracy and proclaiming the "twinning" in English on one side and French on the other now stands in the French town.

Ms. Weninger's frequent visits to Sainte-Mere-Eglise due to her involvement with Operation Democracy, she



Photos by X

At the Locust Valley Painting for Peace Project are Kaye Weninger (l), who created this exhibit for the students with Locust Valley High School Art Teacher Tom Camilleri and students, Sara Taheri, Gabriell Yeager and Julia Ryan from LVHS.

says, "have changed my life in a spiritual way. When you see what these soldiers gave, it changes you."

"Freedom isn't free," she added. "It's important to ed-

ucate today's children about what their grandparents fought for."

The original mission of Operation Democracy was to "spread the concepts of freedom and democracy around the world." The belief, which Ms. Weninger shares, was that this must start in the hearts of the people themselves.

In 1947, the people of Locust Valley got together to help rebuild the town, through a nongovernmental, humanitarian supplement to the Marshall Plan. They sent medical supplies, books, toys, clothing and more to the families of the town, the first to be liberated on D-Day in 1944.

The contact between the two "villages" was lost for many years until Kay Weninger, who was President of the Locust Valley Chamber of Commerce at the time, was approached by Locust Valley resident Cathy Soref. Ms. Soref asked her to research Op-



A sign at the entrance to the village of Sainte-Mere-Eglise honors the "jumelage" between it and Locust Valley.

eration Democracy because her friend, Doug Stebleton, was making a documentary called Mother of Normandy: The Story of Simone Renaud. Renaud was a woman living in Sainte-Mere-Eglise who, out of gratitude and love, tended the many graves of American soldiers buried in France, soldiers who had fought for liberty and freedom. The film has been shown in Locust Valley, and there are plans for

it to be part of the Gold Coast Film Festival in October 2012.

The poem "Locust Valley," written by Simone Renaud, was installed on a bronze plaque on a large rock in Locust Valley in 2006.

Operation Democracy is now a 501c3 non-profit charitable organization. For further information visit [www.operationdemocracy.com](http://www.operationdemocracy.com).



Cathy Soref, Mayor Marc LeFevre, and Kaye Weninger at the International Art Exhibit.