

Veterans Day Remembrances

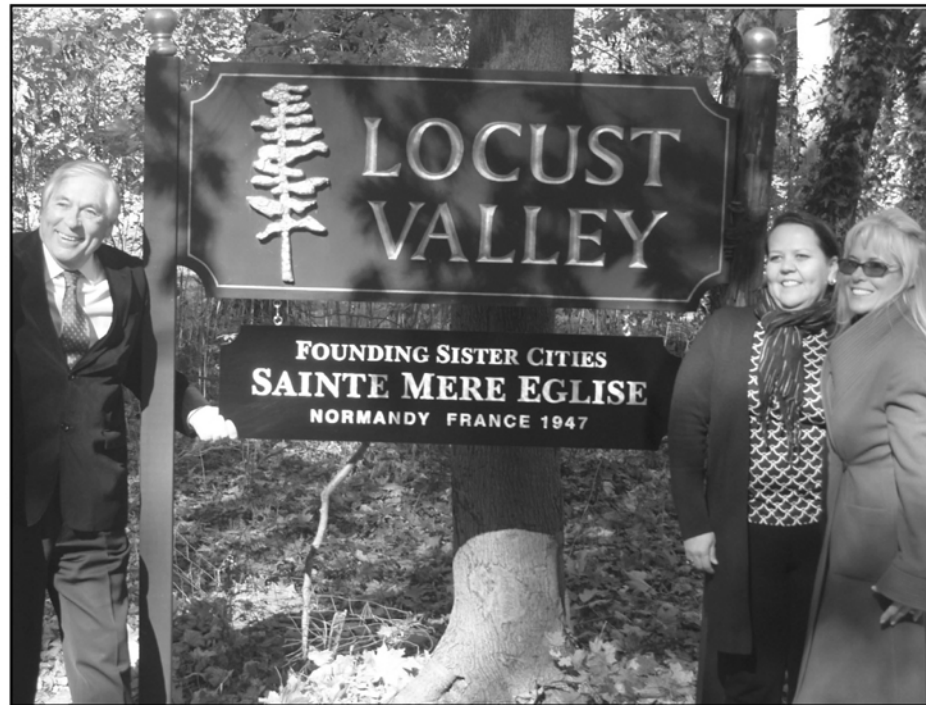
• ADAM GROHMAN

The local community had a busy week of activities and ceremonies in honor of our veterans and their myriad of sacrifices to our nation and world.

On Wednesday, November 10, members of the American Legion from Locust Valley and Bayville attended tributes at the Locust Valley High School. The 700+ students sat in quiet and listened to veterans, watched a video, and heard S.A.D.D. students read letters from soldiers written to their loved ones.

That evening, the community saw the screening of the documentary *Mother of Normandy—the Story of Simone Renaud*. The film recounted Madame Renaud's lifelong attachment to American veterans who had perished during World War II. Madame Renaud, along with her husband (the mayor of St. Mere Eglise) and her three sons, witnessed the invasion and the sacrifice made by the Allied Forces engaged in Operation Overlord (aka the Normandy Invasion) to liberate her town. Madame Renaud began a tradition of tending to the graves of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice to ensure the tenets of freedom. After the publication of a photograph of Madame Renaud tending to the grave of U.S. Army Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr. appeared in *Life* magazine, Renaud received countless requests from the families of those who were buried along the cliffs of the French coastline.

The documentary also recounted Locust Valley's dedication to the town of St. Mere Eglise. In 1947, members of the community, in order to help the war-ravaged French town rebuild, formed Operation Democracy. Packages of clothes, letters of encouragement, and other items, traversed the Atlantic Ocean. Kaye Weninger and Cathy Soref recently reinstituted Operation Democracy and will work with local schools and commu-



Maurice Renaud, Kaye Weninger and Cathy Soref of Operation Democracy

nity groups to reaffirm the importance of American civic duty.

Before the movie, Maurice Renaud, son of Simone Renaud, *Mother of Normandy*, introduced Patrick DuTertre, who was representing the Cousulat General De France. Mr. DuTertre read a letter addressed to Kaye and commended her and Operation Democracy. The letter read, in part, "The friendship between two cities testifies to our profound and common attachment to the American and Allied soldiers who landed on the beaches of Normandy and who fought to restore the liberty of France and its people. Paying homage to Madame. Renaud, notably by diffusing the documentary, which is dedicated to her, allows us all to remember the sacrifice and the selflessness of the soldiers who fought in the landings. Madame Renaud's heroes are also our heroes. Heroes who left to fight

for a cause and for values which transcend the individual: democracy, justice and liberty. We owe all veterans, particularly French and American, for what France is today, free and sovereign. We also owe them for Europe as it is today, peaceful, prosperous and reconciled with itself."

On Veterans Day, a re-dedication of the World War I cannon and a memorial service in honor of our veterans were held at the Locust Valley Library. The event was sponsored by the Matinecock Neighborhood Association. The German cannon had been given to Henry P. Davison by the French government at the end of the hostilities and the MNA refurbished the cannon. Veterans from the Howard Van Wagner Post 962 served as the color-guard for the event, which was attended by officials from the American Red Cross, Town of Oyster Bay and

France. Two students completed the program with their beautiful voices singing the National Anthem of America (Alex Sheerin) and the French National Anthem (Rebecca Melman). Closing the ceremonies, the Rev. Paul Quevedo of the Locust Valley Reformed Church offered a blessing. The laying of the wreaths was conducted by World War II veteran, Arnold Ceglia, 77th Infantry, and Maurice Renaud, French representative from St. Mere Eglise, Normandy. The ceremony ended with the Howard A. Van Wagner's American Legion Firing Squad. Also in attendance at the Veterans Day program was Barbara Gavin, daughter of the World War II commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, U.S. Army Lt. General James M. Gavin.

Operation Democracy executive directors Kaye Weninger and Cathy Soref unveiled the new sign at the entrance to the village on Piping Rock Road which documents the history of the link between Locust Valley and St. Mere Eglise.

Kaye Weninger said, "This week was a time for us to remember and take time to honor these men and women of the military. When I was in Normandy a few years ago, a woman being honored wrote this as part of her speech and I was touched and inspired by her words: "Heroes inspire others with their bravery, their compassion, their strength, their character and their sacrifice. Unheralded and largely unnoticed, they go about their lives of serving and protecting with responsibility and patient endurance and a sense of honor. They light the way for the rest of us to follow when times are dark." I was honored to have been a part of these ceremonies in Locust Valley. We should never forget the sacrifices these veterans and the active-duty soldiers make everyday for us. Remember to take the time and say thank you."