

Honor Flights

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direct flight from Wichita to the Washington, D.C. area. The solution - chartering a plane for \$75,000, a steep increase from Lyndon's average cost of \$15,000 each trip, according to Spencer.

"And that doesn't include meals, buses or gratuity," Payne said.

Their trip, however, will take about three times as many students, veterans and staff on one trip.

"They came to us for assistance and we've helped out with them," Payne said.

"Everybody in Kansas is

trying to do the same thing," Patterson said. "Some people said the kids are getting off easy. They work hard and it's a 20-hour job that day. They give it their all, and the vets are just thrilled to pieces."

Future Flights

With the program just beginning to hit its stride, and more and more veterans joining the waiting list every day, Honor Flights can be expected to continue leaving from Kansas for some time.

"The overall Kansas list is in excess of 150 and



Bill Patterson/Contributing Photographer

Veterans and students walk down the concourse at Baltimore-Washington International Airport.



Kayla Schmidt escorts her veterans, Richard Emerson and Edna Meyer, to the World War II Monument.

Bill Patterson/Contributing Photographer

growing daily," Payne said. "Some applications are mailed directly to us, and some directly to Honor Flight."

Each flight, or hub, helps get more veterans to their destination.

"Once we set a date for a flight, we take in how long they've been waiting, and their geographic constraints," Payne said. "Two of the individuals who were waiting the longest, chose not to go with us, because travel to us was so difficult."

"We intend to fly as long as we can keep funds rolling in," Payne said. "We may have a whole new set of students interested next year. If they have a personally connected veteran, that vet would have the opportunity to travel with that student on their trip. It's currently no cost to the veterans and students. We don't want to make it financially constraining for which students can and can't participate."

For help with costs and support staff, Lyndon has also looked into branching out.

"We're looking at combining with Southern Coffey County next year," Patterson said. "It's kind of neat to bring schools together. The vets are coming in from across the states, why can't the kids? I think they'd be receptive to the other kids, too."

The group process has also helped cut down on the work.

"We all do publicity, we all do different things for fundraising," Payne said. "The bulk of the funds come from personal contributions. We have received some generous grants from civic organizations and businesses. The local community's been really good about helping out."

Everyone from the students to the organizers has put numerous hours into the flights. Each of them have found the experience to be more than gratifying.

"Aside from marriage and children, it's the most emotionally rewarding thing I've ever done," Payne said. "The gratitude of those veterans makes it worth the time and effort."

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