



# The Shamrock

## War Takes Heartbreaking Toll on Historic Town

By Gen Lucidi Payne, Trib Total Media

Safely home after serving four years in World War II, Tony Marchitello eagerly looked forward to reuniting with his parents, Generoso and Concetta, and the dozens of other returning vets from his old neighborhood.



Tony Marchitello

But his first day back in East Pittsburgh, the 24-year-old was given the sad news that his neighbor and high school

classmate, John "Iggy" McLain had been killed during a bomber flight over Germany. Within days his grief grew as he groped with the reality that Iggy wasn't the only close-to-home casualty. Thirteen more of Tony's buddies, all residents of a tightly-knit, four-block area in the Bessemer Terrace section of East Pittsburgh, had given their lives in battle.

Seven of the casualties, including two Robinson brothers, lived on Tony's street, Bessemer Avenue. Seven more were from Western and Center, streets intersecting with Bessemer. In all, 14 of Tony's friends, who grew up within walking distance of each other and whose parents worked at the steel mill, railroads and factories in the Turtle Creek Valley, didn't make it home.

"I was sad. I knew lives would be lost, but why did the war claim so many young men from our tiny neighborhood? It seemed like such a high toll," recalls the now 92-year-old who, along with his wife Mary, continues to call that Bessemer Terrace neighborhood home.

East Pittsburgh mayor, Lou Payne, agrees the borough paid a heavy price in World War II, the deadliest military conflict in America's history.

"In all, 33 men from the borough, or one out of every 180 residents, were killed in action. The national average was one of every 343 who served gave their lives, meaning East Pittsburgh suffered almost twice as many fatalities."

In addition, Payne believes that losing 14 men, from an area equivalent to three football fields, adds up as one of the highest casualty rates of any comparable neighborhood in the country.

"About 2.5 percent of the men who served in World War II lost their lives. We know that 14 casualties in a small neighborhood of mostly single-family homes is a significantly higher percentage than the national average."

Now, Lou is leading a campaign to honor those fallen vets.

"History has always been a big part of East Pittsburgh. Bessemer Avenue was named after the Bessemer converter furnaces used by Andrew Carnegie in 1880. The Westinghouse Bridge opened in 1932 as the world's longest concrete arch span structure. For decades the borough was home to the Westinghouse plant, the company's largest factory. The sacrifice of these men is another chapter of East Pittsburgh history and

should be memorialized.”

The mayor has received a commitment from the East Pittsburgh Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) to fund a \$1,200 project to place banners, with the fallen vets’ pictures, names and ranks, in front of the homes where they lived. The banners will be dedicated on May 17, 2014, Armed Forces Day.

Eventually, he hopes by working with the EPEDC and VFW Post 5008, to raise \$6,000 for a permanent memorial that lists the 14 names.

Tony, as well as George Harnagy, who are the only surviving vets still living in the old neighborhood, agree a tribute is fitting. “They sacrificed their lives. It’s a great idea to honor them.”

### EPEDC’s Annual Kids’ Christmas Party



The Annual Kids’ Christmas Party on December 9, 2013 was a huge success. Over 100 children attended with their parents.

After the lighting of the Christmas tree and singing of carols, the children were treated to a magic show performed by Caputo. Hot dogs, Ho Ho’s, chips, hot chocolate, and candy canes were provided. The children sat on Santa’s lap and told him what they wanted for Christmas and received a small gift.

This was the 5th Children’s Christmas party sponsored by the EPEDC. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers who helped make this event possible.

A special thanks goes to the Salvation Army who served over 120 hot chocolate beverages.

We are deeply grateful to Dave Gumper and his crew for decorating our outdoor Christmas Tree!



### EPEDC Celebrates 25 Years of Service

The East Pittsburgh Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) is committed to revitalizing

and sustaining East Pittsburgh as a livable community. EPEDC is an all volunteer organization. As a member of the Mon Valley Initiative (MVI), EPEDC takes a lead role in housing rehabilitation, home ownership opportunities, workforce development and small business assistance for the East Pittsburgh community.



During the last 25 years, the EPEDC has:

- Developed and built Shamrock Square.
- Finished 12 houses as part of the MVI Rehab for Resale Program.



Before



After

539 Bessemer Avenue

- Collaborated with North Braddock Cares on the development of the Northeast Housing Project, including six two-bedroom units at 216 Bessemer Avenue.
- Plants and maintains the garden at the intersection of the Tri-Borough Expressway and Electric Avenue in conjunction with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.
- Erected the Tot Lot at the East Pittsburgh Community Center in collaboration with the Borough of East Pittsburgh and the East Pittsburgh Athletic Association.
- Sponsors East Pittsburgh’s Children’s Holiday Event.
- Produces the Shamrock, the community newsletter.
- Assisted the Borough in the development of a community website.
- Planted 40 trees donated by TreeVitalize.
- Converted vacant lots into relaxing garden areas.

- Applied for and received grant money from the Prout Foundation to have a mural painted at the intersection of Bessemer Avenue and South Main Street.



Membership in the EPEDC is open to all East Pittsburgh residents. If you are interested, please attend one of our meetings held on the third Monday of each month at the Senior Citizens Center on Grandview Avenue.

## Mon Valley Initiative (MVI)

Mon Valley Initiative (MVI) is kicking off a new year within East Pittsburgh. The major real estate project so far for this year is the Slovak Social Club. The Slovak Social Club has been renovated on the first floor and is rented by MVI as commercial space. MVI will be renovating the second and third floors this year to create 4 one-bedroom apartment units. This is expected to be finished by the end of 2014. MVI is actively looking at properties and reaching out to local homeowners of sound houses not currently in use.



MVI continues to work closely with the East Pittsburgh Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) to assist in growing and strengthening

the community of East Pittsburgh through community events, community beautification, and honoring its residents.

MVI's Workforce Development will be holding the 2014 Employer Appreciation Breakfast on July 18, 2014. This breakfast honors the employers who partner with Workforce in helping our clients become self-sufficient through employment. The Southwestern PA Re-entry Coalition (SPARC), a coalition managed by MVI's Workforce Development Team, will be holding its annual "Life Without Bars" conference on June 1 and 2, 2014. The Conference will provide high-quality education and networking opportunities for agencies who contribute to the prisoner re-entry process and also

job seekers in the process of re-entry.

## East Pittsburgh Police's Animal Care Fund More Than a Pet Project

*By Kathleen Ganster, Pittsburgh Post Gazette*

It started with a police chief with a big heart. Now the East Pittsburgh Police Department Animal Care Fund has helped hundreds of pets.

The department created the animal care fund in 2000 under the direction of now retired police Chief Jack Cassidy and one of his officers at the time, Lori Payne. A self-proclaimed animal lover, Mr. Cassidy and his officers would work with rescued animals, often paying for the care out of their own pockets.



"It always broke my heart to see the animals abandoned or abused," he said.

The police would find animals left behind after residents moved, some simply abandoned and wandering the streets, and others homeless after their owners are arrested. Mr. Cassidy and other officers would get them medical treatment and try to find them permanent homes.

"It seemed that we were helping more and more and I thought we should have a couple of fundraisers," Mr. Cassidy said.

When Mr. Cassidy retired in 2008, Ms. Payne became chief and took over the fund. Mr. Cassidy is still very much involved.

Over the years, the fundraisers have expanded and include various raffles, a large flea market and events at local organizations. There also is a paper recycling bin, which benefits the animal care fund.

The money raised through the fundraisers goes toward food, shelter and medical care for the rescued animals. Donations also are made to the shelters and rescue organizations.

Chief Payne said the number of animals assisted has grown rapidly, making the efforts even more

important.

“We have animals that we get legally through a court order if they are being abused or neglected. We have others from people that we have encouraged to surrender or we find them,” she said.

Chief Payne knows first hand the importance of rescue efforts. She is the owner of Chance, a pit bull that was rescued from a garbage bin, where he was dumped after being beaten and stabbed.

“He is such a special dog. I know how wonderful these animals can be,” she said.

Chief Payne is also a volunteer with Hello Bully, a local organization devoted to creating awareness about the breed. Chief Payne said pit bulls and cats are the animals they rescue the most.

The department works with several area animal shelters and rescue groups to help treat and place the animals. It also has a network of volunteers who assist with the efforts.

One project is to help spay and neuter feral cats and to offer low-cost spay and neutering services to community members.

“We try to find homes for the cats after the procedures. Cats just don’t fare well on the streets,” Chief Payne said.

One of those organizations is Kopy Kat Sanctuary, a nonprofit located in Dormont, that rescues and places cats. Carol Orient, adoption coordinator, said Chief Payne will call when she needs assistance with a cat and often helps with donations for medical costs.

“We can help her with rescuing and placing cats and she pays for their medical costs. It works out really well,” Ms. Orient said.

Kopy Kat provides housing for the cats and helps find permanent homes through an extensive network that includes Petco.

It also works with the Department Animal Care Fund in their low-cost spay and neutering events.

“Chief Payne is awesome. She doesn’t just call Animal Control to get the animals, she tries to help them,” Ms. Orient said.

The East Pittsburgh Police Department is currently

collecting items for its next flea market in the spring. Please contact 412-824-0447 to make arrangements to drop off items at the police department or for pickup.

## New Trash Service

Effective January 2, 2014, East Pittsburgh’s trash service is being provided by Big’s Sanitation. Big’s is a family owned and operated business located in Belle Vernon.



Trash pickup will remain on Thursday. *They start early - around 4:00 a.m. - so be sure to put your trash out Wednesday evening after 4:00 p.m.*

## Police Department Chaplain

The East Pittsburgh Police Department is proud to introduce Pastor Michael Egenlauf as the first Police Department Chaplain.



Pastor Mike joined the East Pittsburgh community three years ago and wanted to become more involved with the Community.

Pastor Mike was ordained in 1989 and has been the pastor of St. Sharon’s Trilam Congregation Church in Duquesne for the past ten years. He is also a member of the Duquesne School District Advisory Council and the Duquesne Church Ministerium.

He’s a former member of the Glassport Crime Watch and has been President of the Trilam Social Support Group for the past 20 years.

In addition to his ministerial duties, Pastor Mike is also a school bus driver and instructor for PA Coach Line.

## In Search Of . . .

We are searching for old pictures of Bessemer Terrace showing places that are now gone. If you have any pictures, please contact Kath Keating.

Comments, questions, or suggestions for articles for The Shamrock should be directed to the Editor, Kathleen Keating, at 412-824-8313 or [kbk535@verizon.net](mailto:kbk535@verizon.net)