

HONOR FLIGHT CHICAGO ★ 2022 ANNUAL REPORT



HFC100

“

It is the first time since I got home from ‘Nam that I was ‘welcomed back.’ For 50 years after I got back, I couldn’t cry. Well, it’s, six days after the flight and I still have a lump in my throat which I hope never goes away.

”



— VIETNAM VETERAN JIM WEINSTEIN

CELEBRATING OUR 100TH FLIGHT

This was a truly historic year for Honor Flight Chicago, beginning with the long-awaited Operation HerStory all-female veteran flight and concluding with our first full flight season since prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After 22 months of honoring veterans in the communities where they live until we could safely fly again, we scheduled four missions to Washington, D.C., within a 10-week timespan in the fall of 2021. One of those missions was the fruition of our partnership with Operation HerStory, which had been announced in February of 2020 mere weeks before the pandemic shut down events all over the globe. Ninety-three senior women veterans traveled to D.C. on that flight, the first of its kind in the state of Illinois meant to raise awareness of the contributions of female service members and ensure that they know they too are deserving of our gratitude and respect.

In the spring of 2022 our full suite of events and programs came roaring back. We staged the ninth Law Enforcement Hockey Classic fundraiser at the Edge Ice Arena in Bensenville, and one month later launched the 100th flight in our history toward our nation's capital. What began in June of 2008 with 60 WWII heroes on our very first flight grew and evolved to include 116 WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans on a chartered 737-800 on our 100th flight.



JOHN PTAK
HONOR FLIGHT
CHICAGO PRESIDENT

Beyond executing a full schedule of flights for the first time in three years, we continued to expand our programming. Most notably, we began “Mission Never Forget” which features hundreds of volunteers sending birthday cards and greetings to our most senior alumni. Once a veteran flies with us, they are forever in our family and this has been a great way to stay connected and let them know their service is still appreciated.

We are so proud of how well we have emerged from the pandemic and how much we have to look forward to. Next year, we will become the first Honor Flight hub in the nation to fly our 10,000th senior veteran to Washington, D.C. That is yet another milestone that would not be possible without our volunteers, supporters and – most importantly – our veterans. Thank you to everyone who has played a part in our success!

CELEBRATING OUR 100TH FLIGHT

In 2007, the co-founders of Honor Flight Chicago came together to launch a local hub in the fledgling Honor Flight Network. Our first trip with 60 WWII veterans took place in June of 2008 under their leadership, and our mission has evolved and grown ever since into what it is today. On April 13, 2022, we celebrated our history and our future with HFC100 – a deeply moving nod to our accomplishments and a look forward to our future.

HFC100 comprised three WWII veterans, 11 Korean War veterans and 102 Vietnam War veterans. We are so thrilled to have had veterans representing all eras we serve onboard our 100th flight.





Our partners came out in full force to celebrate our milestone flight, beginning with Southwest Airlines. In recognition of the fact that all 100 of our trips have been aboard SWA, the airline provided its new flagship aircraft “Freedom One.” The plane, adorned with a Stars & Stripes livery meant to look like a flag waving in the sky, not only carried our veterans to D.C. but waited and returned for the evening leg as well.

Our friends in TSA convened an Honor Guard to greet us at Midway security. That Honor Guard then came to the gate to see us off. Longtime supporter Wayne Messmer reprised his role at the gate with a patriotic speech and performance.





In Washington, D.C., our traditional elements were again in place from the Honor Flight Ceremonial Band of Fairfax greeting at Dulles, to a full-fledged Honor Guard ceremony at the WWII Memorial, to a performance by the Marines Corps Silent Drill Platoon on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.



“I appreciate all of the efforts of you and everyone. It was such a great experience! One of the better days of my life to tell you the truth. All of the volunteers. All of the attention. All of the thank yous. My Guardian was great! The Silent Drill Team was great. *This is nothing like when we came home from Vietnam.* This is for those who didn’t make it home—to keep their memories alive. The Mail Call with all the letters from the school kids was touching.”

— Vietnam Army Veteran Glenn Taras

When we arrived back home at Midway, there was a sight for sore eyes – and ears: the Frankfort Brass Band entertained the crowd and honored our heroes for the first time in nearly five years. We saw friends both new and old, and can't thank enough those volunteers from our earliest days who came back out to serve once again on this special flight.



OPERATION HERSTORY (HFC98)

On February 25, 2020, a coalition of partners took the stage at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library to announce an exciting endeavor: The first all-female veteran honor flight from Illinois to our nation's capital.

This flight would put senior women veterans in the spotlight, making it known to all that they too are deserving of our thanks and respect for their service and sacrifice in times of war.

Twenty months (!) later, Operation HerStory finally took off on October 6 with Honor Flight Chicago with 93 female heroes aboard. The veterans comprised all of the eras we serve: WWII (2), the Korean War (7), and the Vietnam War (84).

During a special itinerary, these women were feted at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial (WIMSA) before witnessing the Changing of the Guard at Arlington National Cemetery. They then visited the memorials built in tribute to their service on the National Mall, including special moments at the Vietnam Women's Memorial.





Conceived by Vietnam War veteran and Air Force Master Sergeant Ginny Narsete, Operation HerStory brought together a diverse group of organizations and individuals with a common goal. The coalition recruited the veterans and raised the funds for this mission, and Honor Flight Chicago was proud to be the Operational Partner executing the flight itself.

The feedback was glowing. “Mom, I haven’t seen you this excited or weak in the knees since you held your [grandchild] for the very first time,” said one daughter to her Vietnam veteran mother after the flight. The end goal of Operation HerStory is to fly more women veterans. Before this flight, Honor Flight Chicago had served nearly 200 women veterans, but so many more are out there and deserving of this experience.

“I enjoyed meeting and talking with other vets who served before me. *Without them blazing the trail for me, I would not have had my career.* Favorite moment was the Woman’s Memorial and they made me feel like a charter member.”



— Vietnam Veteran Sandy Forsberg



HFC99



HFC99 capped off our 2021 flight season and a stretch of four flights in 10 weeks to honor 437 senior war heroes.

We were the first Honor Flight hub in the entire country to return to action after the COVID-19 pandemic paused all flights. The office fielded call after call from other hubs asking “How did you do it?” “How did this work?” Our answer first and foremost was simple: our volunteers.

In 2021 we were featured on every news network in Chicago and highlighted on NBC’s Nightly News with Lester Holt and the TODAY Show; ABC’s World News Tonight with David Muir; and on CBS This Morning.

HFC101

On HFC101, we made Honor Flight Magic! Each flight, we select a handful of veterans to be featured by our talented interview team.

One of the Vietnam Veterans featured was Lew Bottando, a three-time Purple Heart and two-time Bronze Star recipient. Shortly after we posted Lew’s interview online, we received a message from one of our HFC100 veterans. He was a high school classmate of Lew’s, and he said they went in different directions after graduation. He was told Lew was KIA in Vietnam. With help from our volunteers, they have now reconnected.

That’s not all. Visit our website for more magic from the flight.



“This flight gave us all the opportunity to be born again into a new life. Didn’t hear one complaint from anyone, although one fellow remarked ‘I didn’t think anyone cared.’ He, and all the rest of us, have taken the first step on the remainder of our journey, revitalized and refreshed. *Thank you and all the other ‘angels who walk among us’ at Honor Flight Chicago.* We will never forget your kindness and generosity.”

— Vietnam Army Veteran Paul Dytrych



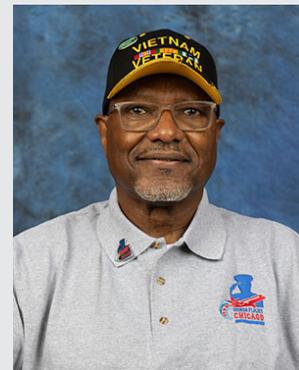
HFC102

Honor Flight Chicago's 102nd mission to Washington, D.C., will go into the record books. It was our largest flight in terms of veterans with 119 (1 WWII, 7 Korea, 111 Vietnam). It was also our longest. An unfortunate maintenance issue with our scheduled return aircraft left us at the gate at Dulles until after midnight, pushing back the Welcome Home until well after 2 a.m. CT.

The best organizations pull through in the face of hardship. In moments like that, they shine the brightest. Honor Flight Chicago is one of those organizations because our volunteers insist on it.

It was a long trip, but it still was a fulfilling and life-changing day for our veterans.

“This day of celebration was amazing and overwhelming to say the least, from beginning to end! Emotions that have been suppressed in my soul for 55 years that I thought were well buried surfaced yesterday. Comrades that I shared ‘my phone charger’ with as a life line to maintain memories would have been the same men that I would have ‘shared my ammo’ with in Vietnam to sustain our mission! *In the chain of life I’ve lived, Honor Flight Chicago has provided me with the link that I didn’t realize was missing.*”



— Vietnam Marine Corps Veteran Ed Davis

HFC104

We honored four WWII, 10 Korean War and 97 Vietnam War veterans on our 104th flight. It began with a bugle call from honored veteran John Carson at the gate. The celebration continued throughout the day for John and 110 other senior war heroes before building to a crescendo at a terrific Welcome Home.

This day included a special performance by the Air Force Drill Team at the Air Force Memorial. John Carson then reprised his bugler role alongside our regular bugler, Richard Pasciuto, to sound Echo Taps at our WWII Memorial ceremony. It was such a great day that the flight home actually arrived a few minutes early!



OPERATION EDUCATION

At Honor Flight Chicago, not only do we honor and thank our senior war heroes, but we also inspire future generations by sharing the stories of our veterans and demonstrating the power of gratitude and respect. One of the most impactful and enjoyable ways we do that is through Operation Education.



OPERATION CLIMB

OPERATION CLIMB (Connect Learn Inspire Motivate Build) is a group of dedicated high school students given unique opportunities to connect with veterans, support the mission of Honor Flight Chicago and develop skills to become productive members of their communities.

Here is one testimonial from one of our Operation CLIMB alumni, who is now attending the Naval Academy at Annapolis:

“Honor Flight Chicago’s Operation Climb has opened my eyes to the importance of the profession I am pursuing.

Through the welcome parades, the interaction with veterans and their families, and seeing the commitment of our volunteers, I’ve seen just how much sacrifice really means to people. I absolutely love the group I was lucky enough to meet; they inspire me to take actions that are bigger than myself. Above all else, I’ve learned that I walk in the footsteps of giants, and that the best way to honor them is to show gratitude and pay it forward,” one student said.

Email Honor Flight Chicago at climb@honorflightchicago.org for more information on joining Operation CLIMB!

OPERATION EDUCATION RESOURCES

Honor Flight Chicago’s Operation Education prides itself on working with schools to help determine how to best support their goals while also expressing gratitude toward our senior war heroes.

Operation Education offers unique resources for educators and an invaluable forum for sharing ideas, including, but not limited to:

- Themed content calendar
- Veteran interviews
- Follow in a hero’s footsteps
- Bootcamp PE project
- Recommended book list



OPERATION EDUCATION FLIGHT (HFC103)

Summer vacation was in full effect as we flew 111 senior war heroes (2 WWII, 4 Korean War, and 105 Vietnam War) to Washington, D.C. Not only was it a balmy 96 degrees in our nation’s capital, we had 13 teachers and students serving as Guardians for the inaugural Honor Flight Chicago “Operation Education” mission.

We have for many years endeavored to connect our veteran alumni with students in classrooms around the Chicagoland area to serve as first-person witnesses to history while also teaching our youngest generations about

the power of gratitude and respect. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we sought to greatly expand that initiative as a way to continue to spread Honor Flight Chicago’s mission even as flights were grounded.

Thanks to the input and efforts of our committee of educators and our committee of high school students (who are known as Operation C.L.I.M.B.), our outreach and impact in schools has expanded exponentially! We now have hundreds and hundreds of partner schools and organizations that participate in some aspect of Operation Education.

This flight was a way for us to spotlight those efforts to keep the momentum going. In addition to our teachers and students serving as Guardians, we had NJROTC and SeaScouts play roles at Welcome Home, and had student interns from the Navy Memorial work tirelessly in Washington, D.C., to ensure a successful trip.

We thank our teachers and students for their work in honoring veterans year round, and especially in ensuring our 111 HFC103 veterans had a life-changing day of honor, thanks, and inspiration.

OPERATION EDUCATION 5K

The 2021 Operation Education 5K was a student-led initiative to raise funds for Honor Flight Chicago's mission. The goal was to support our effort to Honor, Thank, and Inspire our senior war veterans by having supporters Honor, Thank, and Perspire.

Participants had the option to complete a virtual 5K between November 1-13 or participate in-person on November 6 at Morton West High School in Berwyn.





LAW ENFORCEMENT HOCKEY CLASSIC

We had an amazing night at the ninth annual Law Enforcement Hockey Classic! Thanks to both teams from the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the Chicago FBI for an instant classic game – CPD scored an empty-netter to win 6-4 – and to the over 1,000 fans who came out to support the teams and our senior veterans. We’re already excited for the 10th edition next year!



HONOR. THANK. INSPIRE.

AN HFC PODCAST

“Honor. Thank. Inspire.” is a podcast where we sit down with senior war heroes and hear — in their own words — their experiences in service to our nation. The podcast captures living history via first-person accounts from the men and women who served and sacrificed. Meet some of the heroes who appeared on the podcast this season.



In the absolute chaos that was Omaha Beach on D-Day, 20-year-old **Ray Wagner** found himself twice thrown into the water before scrambling onto the sand, death and destruction all around.



When **Charles Nichols** returned home from Vietnam, he immediately found himself in another fight against rabid war protestors. Deciding it was safer to return to battle, Nichols volunteered for a second tour.



Army Corporal **Rich Bernier** served on the front lines of the Korean War. One day, the bunker he had just left took a direct hit from a mortar, killing all inside. He received serious wounds, and ultimately a Purple Heart.



Lew Bottando describes himself as lucky. He has been married 50 years to his high school sweetheart and came home alive from the jungles of Vietnam after earning two Bronze Stars and three Purple Hearts.



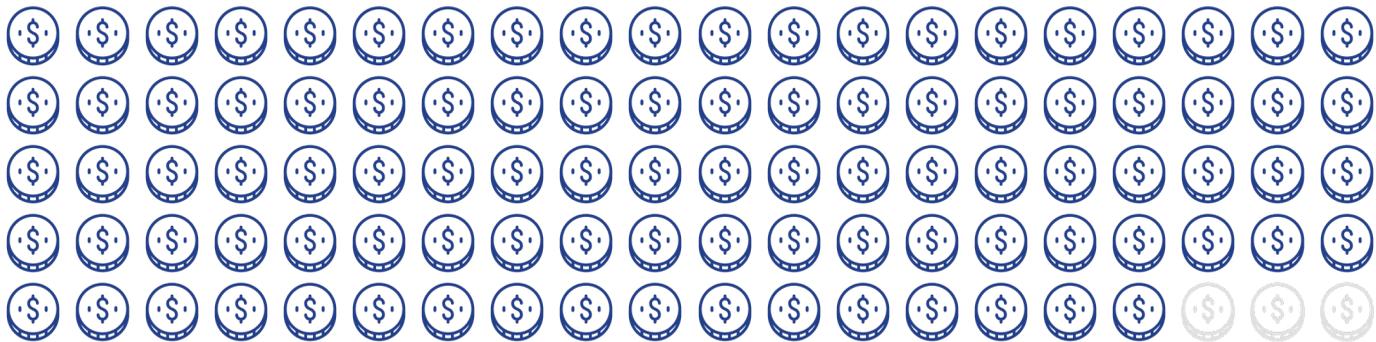
Mike Osika was aboard the USS Enterprise in 1969 when explosions ripped across the flight deck. Mike joined the fight on the deck to save the ship from the inferno that claimed 28 lives and injured more than 300.



Bill Shoop served as a teletype operator during the latter stages of World War II in Europe, first during the Battle of the Bulge and later from the International Military Tribunal known as the Nuremberg Trials.

FINANCIALS

REVENUE	
Contributions	\$753,997
Grants	\$112,700
Guardian Reimbursements	\$123,592
In-Kind Revenue	\$1,942,848
Special Events, Net	\$78,341
Other Revenue	\$93,550
Total Revenue	\$3,032,731
EXPENSES	
Program Services	\$3,134,477
Management and General	\$79,465
Fundraising	\$30,746
Total Expenses	\$3,244,688
NET ASSETS	
Net Assets, Beginning of Period	\$2,489,131
Net Assets, End of Period	\$2,277,174
Change in Net Assets	- \$211,957



97 cents of every dollar spent went directly to honoring veterans

SPECIAL THANKS

- Our current active duty military for their service and sacrifice
- 115 Bourbon Street
- Abt Electronics
- Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center
- American Taxi Dispatch, Inc.
- ANB Café Inc.
- Andrew and Alice Fischer Charitable Trust
- Arnie Daxe, Chair Welcome Team at Dulles Airport
- Assurance Caring Together Foundation
- CFBA “Honor Flight Band” and its Director Geoffrey Seffens
- Chicago Bears
- Chicago Blackhawks
- Chicago Cubs
- Chicago White Sox
- Chicago Community Foundation
- Chicago Department of Aviation
- Chicago Fire Department
- Chicago Fire Department Pipes and Drums
- Chicago Park District
- Cless Family Foundation
- Colliers International
- Crown Point Community Foundation
- Dave Benbennick and Jeff Smith, Oxygen Coordinators
- DC Guardians and Volunteers at Dulles Airport
- DC Logistics Team
- Debicki Foundation
- Deloitte
- Diamond Communication Solutions
- DM Merchandising, Inc
- Dough Guys Bakery
- Dresden Generating Station Employees
- National Air and Space Museum—Stephen F. Udvar Hazy Center
- Dulles Airport Operations and TSA
- DuPage Veterans Foundation
- Employees and Volunteers of Midway Airport
- Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
- Fairfax County Police Department
- Firefighters Highland Guard of Naperville
- Flying Tigers Surplus
- George M. Van Cleave Family Foundation
- Gotta Swing, LLC
- Herndon (VA) Police Department
- Jewel Osco
- Joint Service Color Guard
- Karen Pride, Director of Media Relations (CDA)
- Kevin Willman and Video Expressions
- LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry
- Legacy Foundation
- Libertyville Sunrise Rotary Foundation
- Lutheran Life Communities and Lidia Rincon
- Masonic Family Health Foundation
- Medical Guardians and all of our front-line medical workers
- Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
- Midway Airport Firefighters, Paramedics, Police Officers, MATCO and Prospect
- Midway Partnership—SSP America
- Midway Transportation Security Administration (TSA)
- Minuteman Press, Morton Grove
- Mission BBQ
- Motorola Solutions Foundation
- National Park Service Police Escorts and Volunteers
- Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management
- Operation Education, partner educators and schools
- Our motorcycle groups
- PEL/VIP and Ray Kalinsky
- Pipes and Drums of the Chicago Police Department
- Radio One, Dallas, TX
- Red Poppy Creative, Graphic Designer
- Rob Williamson, Photographer and Photo Manager
- Southwest Airlines
- Standard Parking at Midway Airport
- Stephen R. Brown, Photojournalist and Publisher
- U.S. Congressman Sean Casten
- U.S. Congressman Dan Lipinski
- U.S. Congressman Mike Quigley
- USO Dulles Airport
- Village of Bensenville
- Virginia State Police
- Wintrust Financial Corporation
- Women in Military Service for America Memorial
- U.S. Navy Sailors and Officers, Naval Station Great Lakes
- Honor Flight Chicago’s Board of Directors
 - John Ptak, President
 - Bonni Pear, Vice President
 - William Hassett, Secretary
 - Mary Pettinato, Treasurer
 - Alan Garfield, Director
 - Paul Meincke, Director
 - Captain Mark Meskimen, Director
 - Cyndi Greenglass, Director
- The Honor Flight Chicago volunteers

“I want to go again! I didn’t feel honored when I first came home, but I feel honored now. Honor Flight Chicago should run the rest of the world! You don’t have to thank me, I should be thanking all of you.”



— VIETNAM VETERAN JERRY FLECK



Freedom One

