

Plaque memorializes Chinese-American veterans

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MADISON HEIGHTS — Now that he's honored his country by serving in the military, Andrew Wong is honoring his fellow Chinese-American veterans.



The 85-year-old Beverly Hills resident recently designed a plaque memorializing veterans of Chinese descent. The display made its debut at the Chinese Community Center, located in the

32000 block of Concord Drive, on Nov. 11, Veterans Day.

"It's to honor those in our community who

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Above: Glen Dong, treasurer and board member for the Association of Chinese Americans, speaks about a plaque memorializing the military service of 150 Chinese-American veterans at its unveiling Nov. 11, Veterans Day, at the Chinese Community Center in Madison Heights.

Right: Andrew Wong, past commander of AMVET Post 85 who served with the Army Signal Corps in World War II, salutes during the ceremony. He designed the memorial.

Photos by Andrew Potter

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gave their service, some their lives, in defense of our country, and to address what appears to be an unrecognized service that Chinese-Americans give," Wong said. "They're what they call the 'silent minority.' People don't realize what they've done."

The pagoda-shaped plaque was funded by donations from AMVET Post 85, which is largely Chinese-American, and the Detroit Flying Tigers Association. Inscribed on it are the names of 150 veterans who are members of, or identify with, the Chinese community of Michigan and Greater Toledo, Ohio.

Wong said that 80 of the names were drawn from a list of veterans compiled by former Post Cmdr. George Lim Poy, who himself served as a navigator on a B-24 in World War II. The Memorial Plaque Committee uncovered another 70 names.

Born in New York City, Wong was drafted out of high school to serve with the Army Signal Corps in China and India during World War II. Upon completing his tour of duty, he moved to Michigan, where he raised a family and joined AMVET Post 85.

Now, the memorial he created aims to "adjust the perception that many people hold that Chinese are just sojourners who don't set down roots in this country," he said, and "to instill in our youth a sense of pride, self-worth and patriotism.

"Before, there had never been any place (in the region) where there was an enduring display for Chinese-Americans," Wong said.

Sharing the sentiment that the memorial was long overdue, 79-

year-old Thomas Lee of Warren, current Post commander of AMVET Post 85, said, "We weren't just students here living on our laurels; we served our country."

For Lee, military service runs in the family.

Born in Detroit, his three brothers served in World War II, including his older brother who at age 19 "got shot up" at the Battle of the Bulge and survived.

When his brothers returned home, "they didn't say too much about the war," Lee said. "They got their G.I. bills and went back to school."

After graduating from Cass Technical High School, Lee also considered the prospect of college, but decided he was more smitten with movie depictions of the Navy. He enlisted during peacetime in the late 1940s, serving in the military from 1947 to 1953, a time that included the Korean War.

"I had a chance to go to Korea on the Battleship Missouri," Lee recalled. "I had five years, nine months and 19 days of active duty, then I was in the reserves for another seven years."

His time on the famous battleship included working as a fire control technician, aiming the main battery of 16-inch guns and shelling some 4,000 rounds every other day.

Now his son, Stuart Lee, 39, has followed in his footsteps. He served in Desert Storm, joining the Navy at age 17 and serving six years on an aircraft carrier as an electronics technician. Then, just like his father, he came home to work as an engineer at GM.

For Lee and his family, their sense of patriotism is so strong that his children once thought they were just American.

"When they came home from grade school, they asked, 'Mom, are we Chinese?'" laughed Lee. "We instilled upon them an American way of life; they didn't realize they were different from anyone else. We had to explain to them, 'Yes, your mom and dad are both true-blooded Chinese.'"