



Gilroy High School Gilroy Unified School District

750 West Tenth St. • Gilroy, California 95020 • Telephone: (408) 847-2424 • Fax: (408) 847-3505

James Maxwell, Principal

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to introduce you to an exciting program I have been involved with for the past year called STORIES of SERVICE, an innovative program that mobilizes our students to capture the personal stories of America's "Greatest Generation", by using computers to produce short "docu-drama" videos called "digital stories". What a way to enhance their studies of World War II by working with primary sources—the men and women who actually lived the defining events of the 20th century!

I am sure many of you have had local veterans come in to your classes as "guest speakers". You may have had your students interview neighbors or relatives that had experiences during World War II. Over the past 18 years of having my students engage in projects like these, I suddenly realized that these men and women who served our nation are now leaving us at a rate of one 90 seconds. One of my heroes, Aldo Viarengo, was a B-17 Bombardier in the skies over Europe during WWII. After years of engaging my students with his vivid stories, Aldo passed away, and I was left reading old news clippings of his heroics. We have to find a way to preserve their stories now so that they can continue to educate and inspire future generations.

I have always been a firm believer in project-based learning and utilizing technology in the classroom. As you know, this is the "digital age" and our students are members of the "YouTube Generation". The STORIES of SERVICE program gave my students the chance to jump into a fun project that utilized their computer and movie-making skills while immortalizing the personal stories of these veterans and sharing them with the world on the Internet.

When I first learned about STORIES of SERVICE at a conference for history teachers at our county office of education last fall, I was instantly hooked. Teachers were encouraged to invite motivated students to take on one or two stories, pairing them up with a local veteran to create their videos. Maybe I was naïve or overly ambitious, but I volunteered (drafted) all 165 of my students to join in the fun. We found 26 local heroes who served our country during WWII and teamed them up with 5 students to create their "movies."

We felt it was important for us to honor the diversity of our town, Gilroy, California. From the munitions worker to the Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, our stories covered a wide spectrum of wartime experiences. We included stories of pilots, infantry, and sailors, of Mexican-American soldiers, the Japanese-American internment and the Holocaust. One of the very highlights of the program was seeing how the students bonded with the seniors while preserving history – and earning an "A". (I got a real kick out of watching a group of teenagers working with an 85 year-old submariner.)

At the end of the semester in May, we honored these veterans and students with a public ceremony at City Hall and started a "Veteran of the Week" program with each movie shown on our local cable channel and the on-line edition of our local newspaper. www.gilroydispatch.com/news/248093-stories-of-service.

As I plan ahead for this year's adventure, I've reflected on all the vital skills our students develop while engaged in digital storytelling. They learn interview techniques and script writing. They learn video production and enhance their computer skills. They bring their studies of WWII to life while immortalizing the contributions of our "Greatest Generation". I invite you to learn more about this program and view a few of our videos online. Visit www.stories-of-service.org to start honoring service while preserving history. Good Luck!

Darren Yafai
History Teacher
Gilroy High School and Christopher High School

Co-administrators

Assistant Principals: Greg Camacho-Light Stefani Garino MaryAnn Boylan
Dean of Discipline: Mariano Corzo