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Governor honors fallen heroes

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Staff photo by Bob Livingston

Wabash Valley College Saturday hosted Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn for the unveiling of the Portrait of a Soldier exhibit in the Brubeck Arts Center. Above, Gov. Quinn dedicates the memorial exhibit displaying hand-drawn portraits of fallen service members from Illinois since Sept. 11, 2001, in the Global War on Terrorism. On left, is State Rep. Roger Eddy with Gold Star Family members and Fred and Gay Eisenhower, parents of PFC Wyatt D. Eisenhower (Pinckneyville), Rachelle Wright, Shirley Wright, David Wright and the Rev. Allen Wright. Behind the governor is Terry Bruce, Chief Executive Officer of the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges District. Rev. Allen and Shirley Wright are parents of SPC Brian Wright (Keensburg).



Also present were Terry Bruce, chief executive officer of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges District 529, Matt Fowler, president of Wabash Valley College, and Tom Meeks, mayor of Mt. Carmel. Each spoke briefly to the crowd of approximately 100 who joined them.

Also speaking briefly were Patricia Evans, Gay Eisenhower, Teresa Clark and Shirley Wright. They spoke about their sons, and how they loved them.

"It's a real honor to be here in Mt. Carmel," said Gov. Quinn. "We want to thank Wabash Valley College for hosting something very special. I think anyone who sees Portrait of a Soldier they're like this - changed - looking into the eyes of our service members who have given their lives for our country and our democracy since the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001. These men and women live forever in our hearts."

"Our state is a big state. We're fifth largest in the country. We're almost 13 million people in Illinois. But we're not just a crowd of people that run in their own separate directions - everybody goes their own way. We believe in community. We believe in shared values. We believe in values like patriotism and helping your neighbor. We believe in family. That's what we're really kind of remembering here today," said Gov. Quinn.

"I think everyone knows that our military today - every single one of our military - they're volunteers. No one's drafted. Everyone volunteers," he added, quoting a passage from Isaiah that speaks of volunteerism.

The governor said he had been in Iraq and Afghanistan earlier this year, but only for a couple of days, where the temperature was 125 degrees. "Our service members are there for months at a time, sometimes for years," he

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By BOB LIVINGSTON — Staff Writer | 0 comments

Governor Pat Quinn joined with Gold Star Families for a ceremony at Wabash Valley College for the unveiling of the Portrait of a Soldier memorial exhibition Saturday.

"Today, as we remember those who lost their lives, it is fitting that we honor our service members and their families," said Governor Quinn. "I am honored to be joined today by Gold Star Families whose sons and daughters have lost their lives in the Global War on Terror and are Illinois' true heroes."

The exhibit, in the Brubeck Arts Center lobby, will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

The memorial exhibition, which has been viewed by thousands of people in more than 45 cities and towns throughout Illinois, is a series of hand-drawn portraits of more than 220 Illinois men and women who have died in service to our country since Sept. 11, 2001.

Gov. Quinn and State Rep. Rodger Eddy (R-Hutsonville) were joined by members of Gold Star families including Rev. Allen and Shirley Wright, parents of SPC Brian Wright (Keensburg); Teresa Clark, mother of LCpl Nicholas Kleiboeker (Irvington); Patricia and Terry Evans, mother and step father of SPC Ryan Carlock (Macomb); ; and Fred and Gay Eisenhower, parents of PFC Wyatt D. Eisenhower (Pinckneyville).

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said.

"We had, this past year, 3,200 Illinois National Guardsmen in Afghanistan at the Gates of Hell, right there, eye-to-eye with Al-Quida and the Taliban, the very people who perpetrated 9-11. Our soldiers from the Land of Lincoln were there. And I visited with many of them. And I was so grateful, from the people of Illinois, for their service. That's what they share; that's what they share with everyone on this wall - an ethic of service," said Gov. Quinn.

Bruce said, "It's an honor for the college and the college system to be a participant in recognition for the tremendous effort put forth by Illinois soldiers.

Representative Eddy said, "I have known the governor for a number of years now. And the sincerity of his belief in this cause and this issue, I think, transcends through the years of his public service. I have, on several occasions, been with him at the services for these heroes. I just applaud the fact that he has made the commitment to make this a priority in his administration."

Mayor Meeks noted he has a nephew that shipped out for Iraq on Sept. 3. "I pray for that young man every day. I pray for all of our men and women in the military every day. You hear about on the news every day it costs a couple of guys, IEDs, whatever. When you come in here and see this, it brings it home."

"I'd like to thank Gov. Quinn for all he's done for each and every one of these soldiers, for their families. I'd like to thank the families for coming out this afternoon, also. It's overwhelming to come over here and, as they said, see eyeball-to-eyeball with each of these soldiers, to stand there and look at their faces," said Fowler.

Artist Cameron Shilling of Mattoon drew the first portrait in August 2004, after Army Spc. Charles Neeley, also of Mattoon, was killed in Iraq. Schilling gave the sketch to Spc. Neeley's parents to convey his sympathy for their loss.

In October 2005, while a student at Eastern Illinois University, Schilling decided to draw a portrait of every Illinois service member who has fallen during the Global War on Terror.

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