



MEMBER PROFILE

History lessons

PAUL LARUE

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What inspired you to develop your research history class back in 1998?

I taught in a traditional classroom, and I wanted to do something to get the students more hands-on involvement. It's more interesting when they can do more than just read out of a textbook and can get out into the community. . . . They develop people skills and learn while serving. I'm not saying we should scrap traditional history. But this is a great way to give students another way to look at history.

Since 2003, your students have been interviewing veterans for a Library of Congress project.

We've interviewed some veterans from the Korean and the Vietnam eras, but we really feel like it's the World War II folks that the clock is ticking on. . . . About half of the World War II soldiers we've interviewed are African American. The army wasn't desegregated until after the war, so they served in a segregated army. Students hear these gentlemen share these stories, and it's eye-opening for them.

What are the most important things students take away from the class?

A lot of times kids will say, "Nothing interesting ever happens here," and the truth is there's interesting

history everywhere. The students realize there are some neat things that have happened in our community, and they feel like they helped to preserve that. And a lot of them have a family connection. One of the students is interviewing his grandfather, a World War II veteran. And they had never had that conversation. I'm struck by how many of these veterans say, "I've never really talked about this much."

What happens to the interviews?

The Library of Congress started the oral history project in 2000. If you were to do research on a particular group or battle or whatever, this is a source of information. You can go to their site and look up people by name.

You interviewed Ohio State vice president and dean emeritus John Mount. What did you learn?

I've known John for many years, from my student government days. He was one of the veterans who said he had never talked much about his service. Here's a man who's spoken to a million different groups, but it's just not something they get into. He was in the navy. One of the questions we asked him is what he did for good luck. He said, "I carried a buckeye," which is kind of classic John Mount.

Paul LaRue and his 2009 class of seniors interviewed World War II veterans including Fred DiDomenico, left, and Louie Kuhlwein, both 1949 graduates of Ohio State. LaRue has won state and national recognition for his work in encouraging students to research history.

What are some of the other tidbits you hear?

There are little things that you don't learn in history books. For instance, several of these veterans were drafted between their junior and senior years of high school. . . . A lot of times my students are exactly that age.

Is it hard to get the veterans to talk about their experiences?

Several of them have said they're not comfortable talking about it. . . . It's amazing how raw some of these memories still are. . . . We've had more than one veteran get choked up while talking about a buddy they lost, or family members.

How do the kids react to that?

I think they're struck by it. That's just not something they're used to seeing. ■

Learn more: www.loc.gov/vets

Interview by **ANDREW SHARP**

TALK TO PAUL

Send comments to Paul via talktous@ohiostatealumni.org.