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French Consulate to Award Thank You Certificates to WWII Veterans

Contributed by Angela Kilcrease - 601.266.4988
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HATTIESBURG, Miss. -- French instructor Keltoum Rowland and her students at the University of Southern Mississippi want to honor all World War II veterans who took part in the Normandy landing and French liberation in a ceremony at 2 p.m. May 2 at the Thad Cochran Center on the Hattiesburg campus.

A "Thank You America" certificate will be presented to each veteran in attendance by the French Consul General Philippe Ardanaz of the French Consulate in Atlanta. Normandy landing veterans may apply through Rowland until April 23.

"Our goal is simply to provide these veterans who served on French territory, airspace, or waters during WWII with a formal certificate of thanks from the French government," explained Rowland, who joined the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Southern Miss in 2003.

The certificate program has been an ongoing mission of the French Consulate. "I noticed that the Consulate had a program of this nature," Rowland said. "I thought it would be a great idea to do this on our campus as several students have shown interest in WWII events and created cultural projects around that era."

Lisa Foster, a junior history major from Petal, is one those students in her class who volunteered to assist with the ceremony. "I think it is important to remember our World War II veterans and the role they played in our history," she explained.

Also a volunteer at the Armed Forces Museum at Camp Shelby, Foster's research of the Normandy invasion has given her an appreciation of the role these veterans played in American history.

To aid the project, Rowland contacted Adrian Grice, executive director of the State Veterans Affairs Board in Jackson, asking for assistance in reaching qualifying veterans in Mississippi.

Not only did he endorse the program, he issued a news release from his office to statewide media outlets, encouraging participation in the ceremony.

"As each day passes, we have fewer and fewer World War II veterans to honor this way," Grice stated. "I earnestly hope that an overflow crowd of veterans, wives, widows, children, relatives and the public will attend the ceremony to demonstrate respect and admiration for the sacrifices of these patriotic and stalwart men and women."

The Student Government Association (SGA) at Southern Miss offered to co-sponsor the event, along with much needed support by the university's Alumni Association.

SGA Director of Student Initiatives Samantha Nix, a junior from Clinton, majoring in English and French, sees this project as yet another educational opportunity. "We talked about how good it would be to get involved [in this project] to expose Southern Miss students to activities focused on an international level," she said. The chance to meet a French Consul will be an added bonus.

SGA plans to host a reception following the ceremony. SGA President Vince Fabra will open the ceremony, followed by the singing of the National Anthem by Ronnie Hebert, SGA Vice President.

Rowland sums it up by saying "what a good way to know about our veterans in the community and thank them for their service."

Applications for the certificate may be obtained online at <http://www.ambafrance-us.org> or contact Rowland at 601.297.7210 or keltoum.rowland@usm.edu. Veterans will need to provide a record of service in France during WWII for verification.

About The University of Southern Mississippi

The University of Southern Mississippi, founded in 1910, is a comprehensive doctoral and research-extensive university fulfilling its mission of being a leading university in engaging and empowering individuals to transform lives and communities. In a tradition of leadership for student development, Southern Miss is educating a 21st century work force providing intellectual capital, cultural enrichment and innovation to Mississippi and the world. Southern Miss is located in

Hattiesburg, Miss, with an additional campus and teaching and research sites on the Mississippi Gulf Coast; further information is found at www.usm.edu.