

LASTING LEGACIES

By Jenny Kirk

Balaton resident Lora Johnson knows all too well the sacrifices that American servicemembers and their families make and why it's important to honor them as the heroes they are. She was 6 months pregnant with her first child when her husband was killed in action during World War II.

"A lot of people read about World War II — that's history to most people — but it's something I lived through," she said.

Johnson, who turns 98 years old on Friday, grew up near Portland, Oregon. Willard "Bill" Royer, born June 15, 1923 to parents Maurice and Lydia (Jones) Royer, was raised on a rural Balaton farm and graduated from the local high school, as did his five siblings — Neil, Marilyn, Joyce, Lewis and Margaret.

After graduation, Willard Royer moved to Oregon, where he eventually met Lora.

"(Bill) worked out there before he went into the service," Lora Johnson said. "He was good friends with someone I went to school with. That's how I met him."

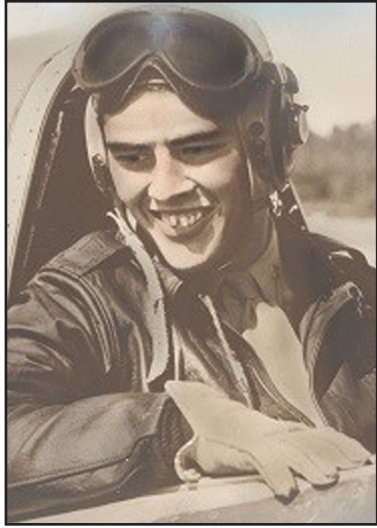


Lora Johnson, a sharp-minded and strong-willed soon-to-be 98 year old from Balaton, recently took time to reflect on her life with Flight Officer Willard "Bill" Royer (top right), who was killed in action on Nov. 4, 1944, and Curtis Johnson, who served his country as a Merchant Marine and died in December 1995 at the age of 73. Submitted photos

The Ultimate Sacrifice

The couple was married in March 1944 at Luke Air Force base in Phoenix, Arizona. While stationed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Willard Royer was ordered overseas. He asked Lora to stay with

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Balaton youth killed in action during WWII include (from left) Willard Royer, Isaac Groeneweg, Charles Garton, Swan Swanson, Jr. and LaDue Penhale. File photos from May 1945

Balaton heroes make the supreme sacrifice

By Jenny Kirk

Memorial Day is about honoring the men and women who have died while serving in the military. In the Balaton area, perhaps no other Memorial Day in the past 75 years has been more somber than the one in 1945.

The Balaton Press Tribune "proudly, but sadly" recognized and honored five Balaton heroes — all who had recently died in service during World War

II — for Memorial Day 75 years ago. It was said to be "one of the largest crowds ever to attend a memorial service" in Balaton.

The Balaton American Legion and Legion Auxiliary sponsored the program back then, much like it does today. The local students were a big part of the memorial service in 1945, as a choir sang, a band performed and nearly all of them took part in a parade

Heroes:
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MEMORIAL DAY MESSAGE

The Balaton American Legion and Auxiliary invited Capt. Andrew Prairie be this year's keynote speaker at the Memorial Day program. While the decision was made to cancel the program, Prairie, the son of Doug and Fay Prairie, graciously offered to share his message (below) anyway. Andrew was raised in Balaton, graduated from Tracy Area High School in 2008 and enlisted in the Army in 2010. He commissioned as an Infantry Officer in 2013 from the University of Colorado and served as an Infantry Officer on Fort Carson, Colorado until 2017. Captain Prairie currently serves as a Psychological Operations Officer with United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) on Ft. Bragg (North Carolina). He is married to his wife Corrina and they have an 11-month-old daughter, Sloane.

By Andrew Prairie

I would like to start by saying that I was both humbled and honored when I was asked by the commander of the Balaton American Legion, John Daniels, to speak at the Balaton Memorial Day service. I was honored because I remember as a kid growing up in Balaton my father would bring me to the very same Memorial Day ceremony in the Balaton auditorium and we would watch the Legionnaires perform drill and ceremony and listen to the keynote speaker. I was humbled because as an American servicemember I would have the opportunity to honor the fallen soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who have come before me and unfortunately, never made it home.

Like many things in our lives over the last few months, that ceremony has been cancelled for good reason, in the interest of public health due to COVID-19. However, we still have the opportunity to honor fallen service members this Memorial Day in our own individual way.

Before it became a federal holiday in 1971, which would be celebrated on the last Monday of the month of May, the day was known as Decoration Day and was celebrated on May 30 every year. This tradition started after the conclusion of the United States Civil War in 1865 and was a day where Americans would decorate the graves of soldiers with flowers and honor their memory after this devastatingly deadly and divisive conflict.

The United States Civil War was incontrovertibly the deadliest conflict the United States has ever fought, killing an estimated 620,000 soldiers. This estimation of soldiers killed in the Civil War has stood for over a century. However, like any war, identification of those killed in action was difficult at best, and impossible at worst due to the chaos and destruction that is war. To make matters worse, record keeping was poor on both sides at the time and many of the Confederacy's documents were destroyed when Richmond was captured. For this reason, historians have long sensed that this estimate may well underrepresent the total soldiers killed in the Civil War.



Balaton native Andrew Prairie, who had been asked to give this year's Memorial Day address, is pictured with his wife, Corrina, and their daughter, Sloane. Submitted photo

In December 2011, historian J. David Hacker published a paper using demographic methods and advanced statistical software to analyze U.S. census records from 1850 through 1880. The goal of this analysis was to determine more precisely the number of those who died in the Civil War. Professor Hacker estimates that 750,000 soldiers died in the war, which is a 21% higher estimate than the 19th century one.

While the annals of history may fluctuate the numbers of those who died in a conflict, or all together forget the names of the men and women who perished in some far away field. I will tell you who never forgot. Their families. You see, because behind every one of those numbers on a piece of paper is a person's name, and behind each of those names was a human life. A life that was tragically cut short prematurely and most likely taken in some horrific manner which most of us would never care to think about. With each of those fallen soldier's names was a family that never got to see their father, mother, brother, sister, cousin, or aunt ever again. That is the sacrifice that sadly, over a million Americans have made since the dawn of this nation and regrettably continue to make today in defense of this great nation.

History is good at remembering the successful leaders of War — George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower just to name a few. Yes, these are all former U.S. Presidents and General Officers if your history is a little rusty. I myself work everyday on Fort Bragg, a base named after Confederate General Braxton Bragg, and where almost every street and major facility is named after an influential Colonel, General Officer or Medal of Honor recipient. Memorial Day is a day, though, where we get to resonate our thoughts on those less immortalized, those that even history may have forgotten.

So how do we honor the fallen servicemembers on this Memorial Day when

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Little Panthers celebrate

The Little Panthers Preschool graduation celebration looked a lot different this year due to the social distancing restrictions put in place throughout Minnesota and beyond due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Under the direction of teacher Jackie Paradis and teacher's aide Betsy Schmidt, the 15 preschoolers and their families lined up along Maple Street on Wednesday in Balaton. A Zoom meeting and the delivery of supplies took place before a special parade around the community.

"We have 15 preschoolers and 11 will go to kindergarten next year," Paradis said. "Betsy and I really enjoyed the parade. We were looking out the window before the parade and got excited to see all the cars lining up on Maple Street."

Paradis said delivering boxes to each of the cars was also fun.

"We got to see all the kids excited, saying, 'Hi,' and shouting our names," she said. "In their boxes were some snacks. We picked out a candy award for each child that Betsy and I chose to fit them. We also included a memory portfolio binder with some of their work they did over the time we were together in school, as well as some pictures of our year."



Samantha Nelson holds a sign congratulating her daughter, Iley, and other preschoolers, stating that "COVID can't stop us!" Photos by Jenny Kirk



Connor Hively is all smiles as he rides inside the family vehicle during the preschool parade on Wednesday.

The preschool students spent the last two months — March 11 was the last on-site school day — learning at home because of Minnesota's stay-at-home



Avery Swan shares a proud wave during the Little Panthers Preschool parade recently in Balaton. A sign below her dad reads: Kindergarten here I come. Class of 2033.

order. Paradis and Schmidt came up with lesson plans, delivered supplies and communicated with the students and parents throughout the distance learning time.

While the experience was much different than the traditional learning process, the transition from preschool to kindergarten is always a milestone worth celebrating, even if it's not together at a big party.

"We put their diplomas in the boxes we delivered as well," Paradis said. "I also ordered a book, but it didn't get delivered in time, so I will get the books to

them later on. The ones moving on will get 'The Berenstain Bears' Graduation Day.' The younger ones will get 'Kindness to Share from A to Z.'"

Several members of the Balaton Fire Department and Ambulance were also in attendance to lead the preschool parade up and down the streets.

"We were very shocked to see all the firetrucks, the ambulance and the sheriff vehicles out to support our preschool, along with the community as well," Paradis said. "It was sure a great feeling to have all the support to celebrate these great young people."

Mail ballot system approved

By Jenny Kirk

Balaton residents will use the mail-in ballot system for the upcoming elections as the Balaton City Council approved a resolution at its May 11 meeting at Balaton Community Center.

Following Minnesota Statute 204B.45 (subd. 1), the City "may provide balloting by mail at any municipal, county or state election with no polling place other than the office of the auditor or clerk or other locations designated by the auditor or clerk."

"We can do this for this year, and possibly permanently if we want," Mayor Lonnie Lambertus said.

Councilman Dylan Fricke asked to clarify if the resolution was only for the 2020 elections and not elections after that. Lambertus said the resolution expires at the end of the year.

Clerk-treasurer Roberta Joehneck said mail-in voting is being encouraged because of the coronavirus pandemic and the social distancing restrictions in place.

"They're very strongly recommending a mail-in ballot with everything going on," she said. "I would

Ballot:

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Oriole attraction

Eye-catching orioles have been spotted this week in the Balaton area. The Baltimore oriole, with its dazzling orange and black colors, is a popular songbird found throughout most of Minnesota. The female Baltimore oriole is pale yellow-orange with grayish-black wings. While the Baltimore oriole is typically the most widely recognized, there are at least nine oriole species in North America. The Baltimore and oriole and the orchard oriole are found in the eastern regions, while the Bullock's oriole and the Scott's oriole are in the western regions. Central Florida is home to the spot-breasted oriole, and the Altamira,

Audubon's, hooded and streak-backed orioles can be found in the southern U.S. and in Mexico.

Bird watching enthusiasts are known to set up feeding stations — with oranges, grape jelly, nectar or mealworms — to attract the vibrant songbirds.

At left: A male Baltimore oriole (above) listens to the squawking of a female oriole as they feed together on suet. At right: A suet feeder near Balaton attracts a variety of birds, including (clockwise from top left) a downy woodpecker, rose-breasted grosbeak and a male and female Baltimore oriole. Photos by Jenny Kirk

