



BETH HOLLERICH, PITTSBURGH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

## Chapter 862's Honor Wagon

BY MARY BRUZZESE

**B**eaver County, Pennsylvania, Chapter 862 unveiled its latest project at a dedication ceremony November 8 at the Pittsburgh Airport Heavy Equipment Building in Moon Township, Pennsylvania. The chapter has refurbished an airport baggage cart to be used as an Honor Wagon to transport fallen servicemen and women who arrive at Pittsburgh International Airport.

Several months ago John Wakeley, an associate member of Chapter 862 who works in field maintenance at Pittsburgh Airport, noticed the casket of a serviceman being taken out of an airplane. Wakeley, a two-tour Army veteran, stopped to watch as the workers placed the casket on a baggage cart "like a set of golf clubs," as he put it.

Extremely upset, Wakeley shared his concerns with coworkers Mark Chamovitz and Jim Moorhead. The three brought up the issue with airport

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authorities and convinced them to donate a baggage cart to be refurbished specifically to transport fallen servicemen.

In late August Wakeley attended Chapter 862's board of directors meeting. He explained the situation, and showed some sketches he had made of the proposed cart. When he asked if the chapter wanted to take on the project, the board accepted without hesitation. The chapter approved \$1,000 to go toward refurbishing the cart. Chapter members Rich Kamzelski and Rich Tindell volunteered to take charge of the project.

Kamzelski and Tindell picked up the cart at Pittsburgh Airport and towed it to Kamzelski's garage, where they began preliminary work. Kamzelski came up with the final design. Around the same time, Chapter Treasurer Larry Googins and Jerry Fisher, a friend of the chapter, were at Hall Industries, a local fabricating company, when the cart came up in conversation. A worker at Hall Industries told them that the company often worked on airport baggage carts and would help with the project.

Soon thereafter Kamzelski went to Hall Industries with Googins and Fisher and

spoke with plant manager Dave McLaughlin. Kamzelski showed McLaughlin his design, and a collaboration between Chapter 862 and Hall Industries began. "When we all put our heads together, the whole project just blossomed," Kamzelski said. "It just kept growing and growing. I never expected it would turn out so great."

Hall Industries contacted three other local companies to help with the project: Signs by Sam, Paff Custom Welding, and Beachem's Sandblasting Service. All four offered their services free of charge. The \$1,000 Chapter 862 had designated for the cart was hardly touched.

The entire cart was sandblasted and the center shelf removed. New wheels were installed, along with stainless steel rollers to load caskets into the cart easily. The entire cart is enclosed to protect caskets from bad weather. Glass siding on the sides allows friends and family to view the casket. The Chapter 862 logo and VVA founding principle, "Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another," are etched into the glass on both sides, along with the emblems of the five service branches and the Pennsylvania National Guard. A plaque on the front lists the organizations and businesses that helped with the refurbishing. "Never Forgotten" is written under the steel doors in the back.

Chapter 862 and the local businesses coordinated with Pittsburgh Airport to make sure the Honor Wagon will be used. It will be kept in a central location in the airport. All airlines transporting fallen service personnel must contact the Allegheny County Airport Authority upon arrival so that the Honor Wagon will be delivered to the plane to transport the casket from the plane and through the airport.

"We hope other cities will see this and do the same thing," Chapter 862 member Lee Corfield said. "John Wakeley has come up with several ideas for our chapter throughout the years, but nothing as strong as this." ■