

LOCALNEWS

Community welcomed to WWII presentation

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The mindset of the Japanese in World War II will be explored in a presentation Thursday at Rainy River Community College.

World War II history buffs, area teachers and students, and people interested in why wars take place can attend “The Japanese mentality in the Pacific war” from 6:30-8 p.m. Thursday in the RRCC theater. Refreshments are available before the presentation at 6 p.m.

This is the fourth year RRCC history instructor Joe Chlebecek has hosted a WWII presentation, and the third year in a row he’s teamed up with art, psychology, and sociology instructor Mark Rooney for the presentation. Previous topics have included the Holocaust, D-Day and the Allied invasion of Normandy, and the Pacific theater.

The idea for the presentations came about due to WWII history’s massive popularity as a world history topic, Chlebecek said. He asked his students if a presentation would interest the community, and a follow-up presentation drew a crowd that couldn’t fit in the classroom. Since then, he said, they’ve held the events in the RRCC theater, with a capacity of 200 people.

This year, thanks to an \$800 grant from the RRCC Foundation, five stipends are available to area teachers to attend the presentation and share the benefits of studying history, Chlebecek said.

“An educator sometimes

works in a bubble,” Chlebecek said. “We need to communicate with each other and we need to share our best practices. Some area educators have not been on RRCC’s campus. I want to help change that.”

Chlebecek has invited teachers from International Falls, Littlefork-Big Falls, Indus, the North Woods School, Lake of the Woods, and Fort Frances. The stipend can help cover travel costs, he said, and the teacher may be able to bring along a student or two.

The goal of this year’s topic is to put attendees in the shoes of the Japanese, and try to understand why they did what they did, even if we don’t agree with it, Chlebecek said. It’s easy to sell the war as good versus evil and to put ourselves in the shoes of U.S., Canadian, and British soldiers. However, it’s still important to try to understand the Japanese mindset, he said.

“A better understanding of the Japanese mentality does not mean agreeing with those actions,” he said. “If that were the case, we would stop studying the Holocaust.”

The presentation will feature Rooney and Chlebecek each giving a 30-minute oral and visual presentation, followed by a 30-45 minute question and answer session. While local WWII veterans won’t play a direct role in the presentation, Chlebecek said they will be interviewed for the presentation, and are welcome to attend.

Chlebecek has been studying WWII history for more than 30 years, he said, dat-

ing back to his undergraduate days at South Dakota State University. He also taught on various WWII topics at Minnesota State University-Mankato, and a sabbatical in 2008 featured a WWII graduate seminar. His family has a military background, he said, with relatives serving in WWII in the Pacific theater and in the Vietnam War.

“The topics my WWII students examine are morbidly fascinating and riveting all at the same time,” he said. “The key question is always, ‘Why do we go to war?’”

Understanding this question is why studying WWII is important for a younger generation, Chlebecek said. Learning about the past allows it to become more relatable, he said, and not just “ancient history.”

“The topics, the historical figures, and the oftentimes morbidly fascinating details connect the students regardless of generation,” he said.

Based on past attendance, Chlebecek said he expects 180 attendees, including RRCC students and instructors, American and Canadian teachers and students, business owners, local professionals, military veterans, and community enthusiasts.

“Overall, the RRCC-surrounding area relationship will become mutually stronger,” Chlebecek said.

Stipends for local teachers are available on a first come, first serve basis, Chlebecek said. Applicants can reach him by phone at 218-285-2217, or by email at joseph.chlebecek@rainyriver.edu.

OUTDOORS

Winter severity index at 191

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The winter severity index for the International Falls area was 191 on Wednesday, reports Larry Petersen, International Falls area wildlife manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The WSI was 189 last week. It was 151 last year at this date, and 42 two years ago, according to Petersen.

“It looks like this winter will end at 191, the second highest total we have recorded here,” he told The Journal. “Last year the snow remained deep throughout April so the index kept

increasing and ended at 184.”

The average WSI for this date is about 116. The area’s harshest winter in the mid-1990s had an index of 196 on this date. It topped out at 216, he noted.

All the winter severity data dates from 1966 to present.

The snow depth is around 16-20 inches in the International Falls vicinity.

“Deer will be dispersing from wintering areas now



Larry Petersen

and will be seeking food where snow has melted such as roadways and fields,” he said.

The winter severity index is a standardized number the DNR uses when considering impacts of the winter on deer. It is calculated using temperature and snow depth in the period from Nov. 1 through April 30, or whenever winter ends. Every day the daily low temperature is zero or below is one point, and every day the snow depth is 15 inches or deeper in an open aspen woods is one point. The points are added each week until winter ends.

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SERRANO PRINT

Local artist Cherie Serrano’s print, shown above, will be displayed at the Voyageurs National Park Rainy Lake Visitor Center next week, starting Sunday. The print was donated to the park by Serrano, who was inspired to create the animal track artwork after she served as a chaperone on her child’s field trip to the park. The artwork features tracks of wildlife found in the park, with the exception of the wild turkey track, shown for comparison, states a park news release. The artwork will be used as a teaching tool to help students and park visitors identify animal tracks in the park.

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