

Longtime NJJS Member Richard Roth Remembered as One of the "Greatest Generation"

Photos by Tony Mottola

On November 13, 2011 a special event at Howell Living History Farm in Lambertville honored "the Greatest Generation" with exhibits, living history displays, and a concert of music of the World War II era by the Full Count Big Band.

Living history educator Stacy Flora Roth coordinated the public program in memory of her late father, Richard N. Roth, a WWII veteran who served as a radio operator and gunner with the 307th Bomb Group in the Southwest Pacific. Family, friends, participants, and the museum staff sponsored the day's activities, which were attended by more than 300 people. Mr. Roth, a native of Newark and later resident of Hillside, Springfield, and Somerset, had a passion for jazz that began in his youth and lasted a lifetime. Richard was a longtime member of the New Jersey Jazz Society who attended many concerts, clubs and festivals over the years.

While the Full Count Big Band filled the Howell Farm barn with swing classics of the '40s, visitors listened, danced, and browsed nearby exhibits. The Army Air Forces Historical Association displayed artifacts,



Barbara Roth, widow of Richard N. Roth, and their daughter Stacy Flora Roth.

member Rob Flory exhibited his collection of radio equipment and manuals, and Ms. Roth assembled an exhibit of photographs and ephemera telling the story of her father's wartime experiences from his training in Atlantic City through his long range bombing missions with the 307th Bomb Group.

Following the public program, the Roth family held a memorial for Richard, who passed away on March 19, 2011. The

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uniforms, memorabilia and photographs that illuminated such topics as Air Force Training in Atlantic City, the WAACs and WASPs, oral histories, a Monopoly board game that was a secret kit for aiding POWs to escape, and the Norden bomb sight (with hands-on operation coached by WWII veteran Bob Grenz). Living Historian Iain Burns displayed his collection of US Navy Radar equipment, honoring his own father's service during the war. Members of the recreated 45th and 28th Infantry Units set out a collection of weapons and accoutrements. Ms. Roth's husband, reenactor John Niemiec, assisted with logistics in the uniform of an MP. Howell Farm staff



Jackie Jones lent her lovely vocals to the music of the Full Count Big Band.

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ceremony opened with the Full Count Big Band playing Jelly Roll Morton's "Dead Man Blues." Eulogies were read and Airmen from McGuire Air Force Base presented a flag to Richard's widow Barbara. John Patterson of Full Count sounded TAPS and a firing squad of seven WWII uniformed reenactors presented a 21-gun salute. The memorial concluded with Richard's favorite tune, "Flying Home," and "He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings."

During her moving eulogy Stacy Flora Roth spoke of her father's love for jazz:

The other passion that consumed him was jazz. In his early teens, his uncle Nessie gave him 78s from the jukebox in his bar when he changed the selections. He was captivated by the sounds on those recordings. It was a love affair that endured for life. As a kid growing up, I remember that the house was filled with that music, especially on weekends, as platter after platter was lovingly placed on the turntable and the liner notes read aloud. It was dad who introduced me to such wonderful musicians as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Stéphane Grappelli, Erroll Garner and many more. He especially enjoyed female vocalists: Sarah Vaughan, Rosemary Clooney, Ella Fitzgerald, Shirley Bassey, Dinah Shore and many others.

These are such happy memories, and I am thankful that I grew up in a house filled with music.

Dad was not a joiner of organizations. He was a mildly introverted, quiet, reserved gentleman who kept to himself. There was only one organization that he belonged to, and that was the New Jersey Jazz Society. Their publication, *Jersey Jazz*, kept Dad abreast of area performers and venues. He and my mother went to many clubs, concerts, and festivals over the years.



Stacy Flora Roth is an educator and historian who performs living history presentations at museums, libraries, schools, civic organizations and festivals. She is a popular speaker with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and is also the author of *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

For more information visit: www.historyonthehoof.com

The Howell Living History Farm is a public park and educational facility of Mercer County Park Commission that provides an example of farming as practiced in New Jersey in the period 1890-1910 at a site where farming began in the 1730s. For more information visit: www.howellfarm.org

