

# The Millbrook Independent

VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

## VETERAN ARTS SHOWCASE

### Veterans paint, speak, and act

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Sat Nov 21st, 2015



*State Senator Sue Serino and Katherine Freston Captain US Marine Corps 1953 - 1965. Photo by Diana Chesmel.*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Veterans Arts Showcase at the Wallace Center of the FDR Presidential Library opened this past Friday afternoon with founder Lori Arella speaking, followed by an eloquent invocation by Rev. Chuck Kramer, Rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Hyde Park. The three-day showcase features painting exhibits, poetry readings, writer workshops, folk-music performances, and theater at the Henry Wallace Center.

At the painting exhibit I spoke to Rosemarie Rogers from Outpatient Art Therapy Program from the Montrose VA. She noted that many who attend the program suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Rogers attempts to put ex-soldier's lives in contact with the process of creativity as an element of healing. Its done with Vets and non-Vets from various war theaters: Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

When soldiers who are trained to perform highly skilled tasks in the theater of war return to civilian life, there is often no place for them. Soldiers have lost their sense of identity and are handicapped as they attempt to re-enter social life. They need a whole new identity. The bonding they experienced during warfare is something extraordinary and civilian life often appears meaningless to them. Rogers attempts to re-purpose their lives, which is not an easy task, given the burden of having lost limbs, memory guilt, and shell shock.

Re-connection through various art therapies allows for other Vets to bond with each other and relate in a public venue. Many paintings on display highlight trauma, disorientation, and alienation. Dreaming by Alfredo de Los Santos was haunting. Waterworks by Kevin Shea displayed unusual style and accomplishment. Footsteps by David Jones told the story of four close friends committing suicide in one week.

An interesting sideline of the exhibit featured posters, collages, and wood-block prints made from soldier's uniforms, which were turned into Combat Paper by The Printmaking Center of New Jersey (founded in 1973). It was haunting to think that the gray paper was composed of uniforms in which soldiers sweated.

The audience was invited to attend a twenty-minute sketch by Impact Theater. The was really a one-hour-and-a-half non-stop performance, directed by Fay Simpson. With little in way of costumes or sets, and the burden of language, Simpson crafted, with the aid of expert mime direction, a riveting drama about Post-Traumatic-Stress-Syndrome, that featured audience interaction. I was riveted to my seat by themes of denial. Here were veterans and civilians producing art worthy of a much larger national venue, which made me recall the heady days of WPA projects under FDR.

If the ghost of FDR lingered about his Presidential Library, I'm sure he would be pleased at these attempts to aid veterans.