



A NATIONAL CELEBRATION
OF AMERICA'S VIETNAM
VETERANS...AND ALL
THOSE WHO SERVE

National Headquarters:

American Veterans Institute

P.O. Box 85

4 1/2 East Main St.

Tipp City, OH 45371

Ph: 937.669.2040

FAX: 937.405.1957

info@AmericanVeteransInstitute.org

Midwest Celebration 2008:

Dean V. Kruse Foundation

P.O. Box 1

Auburn, IN 46706

Ph: 260.927.9144

FAX: 260.927.8043

www.dvkfoundation.org

July 2-6, 2008

North East Indiana

"...that we never forget
the cost of freedom
& the courageous men
and women who have
paid the price..."

Hosted By:



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Welcome Home Event Will Embrace Vietnam Veterans and All Who Serve

Auburn, Angola, Fort Wayne Rally to Support America's Veterans

AUBURN, IN – 2008 marks 35 years since America's withdrawal from Vietnam. To acknowledge that bittersweet anniversary – and to honor America's GIs, past present and future, several northern Indiana towns are joining with an Indiana Foundation and an Ohio-based non-profit to throw a huge celebration honoring Vietnam veterans...and *all* who serve.

The third national *Operation Welcome Home* will be held in northern Indiana, July 2-6, 2008. According to organizers, the *Midwest Operation Welcome Home* (OWH) will be a huge event featuring a welcome home parade, entertainment, exhibitors, fireworks and powerful memorial services. Host organizations for the event are the Kruse Foundation of Auburn, IN and the American Veterans (AVI) Institute based in Tipp City, OH. Kruse founded the World War II Victory Museum in Auburn. AVI founded Operation Welcome Home and has organized or participated in numerous celebrations, including two national events in Las Vegas (2005) and California (2006).

The communities of Auburn, Angola, and Fort Wayne are working to ensure that Vietnam veterans and others will know the gratitude of a nation. Organizers promise a slate of exciting activities, special guests, and veteran-friendly travel packages, as well as free entertainment, in various locations up and down the I-69 corridor.

"This celebration is to honor our vets. They shouldn't have to pay through the nose to be thanked," said Dean Kruse, head of the Kruse Foundation, the famed Kruse Collector Car Auction, and a former Indiana senator.

In 1999 Kruse paid \$22 million to purchase the assets of the Belgian Victory Museum and move them to the World War II Victory Museum in Auburn, IN. That facility is now becoming the National Military History Center, which will pay tribute to America's military from all conflicts. Kruse is also working closely with AVI to establish the American Veterans Hall of Honor and Research Library. Organizers hope to break ground on the expansion during July's Welcome Home event. The groundbreaking ceremony is one of many activities slated for the 4th of July weekend. Plans include a July 2 motorcycle parade to escort the traveling Vietnam Wall to its weekend location at the Kruse facility, followed by a dinner and band at the "celebration central" site on Interstate 69; exhibits and activities at the Kruse facility throughout the four-day event; a memorial service and sponsors' gala the night of July 3; a USO show on Friday and Saturday; an *Operation Welcome Home* parade in nearby Angola on July 4; fireworks on July 4 & 5; a performance by the U.S. Air Force Band of Flight; museum tours, car shows and numerous reunion activities. More activities are being added daily, as sponsors jump on board and more national organizations ask to participate.

www.NationalOperationWelcomeHome.com

“Back in 2004, we envisioned one day of nationwide celebrations, finally welcoming home our Vietnam veterans,” said AVI and OWH Founder Mike Jackson, himself a 100% disabled Vietnam veteran. “It has mushroomed into much more than that and we are thrilled and honored that America is embracing this initiative. We want the Midwest *Operation Welcome Home* to be the biggest and best yet, so we are inviting veterans and their families from all over to attend. But we also need patriotic Americans to show up and say those two all-important words to our veterans: *Welcome Home*.”

Jackson said the objective of *Operation Welcome Home* is to honor the men and women who served in Southeast Asia, as well as those who served in other eras. “But we are also trying to dispel the stereotype of the Vietnam veteran once and for all. These men and women are not dysfunctional outcasts – they are the backbone of America...your teachers, doctors, lawyers, parents and grandparents. They don’t speak much about their service because, for many years, America didn’t want to hear it,” the decorated combat pilot said. “Well, the American Veterans Institute wants to hear it. The Kruse Foundation wants to hear it. And the American people are standing up to say ‘thank you and welcome home’ in a way that stuns even the most hardened cynic. It’s time to heal the past – and to let a new generation of GIs know that we will not desert them.”

Organizers want to hear from veterans, potential sponsors, entertainers, and anyone who wishes to honor the men and women who serve our nation. Details of the celebration and related projects are at www.NationalOperationWelcomeHome.com and www.AmericanVeteransInstitute.org. Veteran supporters and those planning to attend the Midwest celebration can coordinate with each other and offer words of gratitude via www.GIzone.net, a new project of the American Veterans Institute that will be on-line by Oct. 12. Potential sponsors or participants can contact the Kruse Foundation at 260.927.9144 or the American Veterans Institute at 937.669.2040, or at info@americanveteransinstitute.org.