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Visions of Valor offers glimpse of America's heroes

By DAN FELDNER, Staff Writer

Amid the carnival rides, cotton candy and concerts at the North Dakota State Fair this year is an elegant tribute to some of America's greatest heroes.

"Visions of Valor," an exhibit of black and white photographs of Medal of Honor recipients taken by photographer Nick Del Calzo, sits just inside the east doors of the North Dakota State Fair Center. It is a traveling tribute to individuals who showed uncommon valor in the face of extraordinary adversity.

"It's amazing that somebody would do this. To show the pride of America. It's just amazing," said Stephanie Bell of Deering.

Bell saw the exhibit with her mother, Terri Bell, by sheer chance. They had no idea the exhibit was in the State Fair Center when they entered the building, but had to stop and look when they noticed it.

"We walked in and just saw it. I didn't know it was going to be here," Bell said. "And it's something that catches your eye right away."

The display was especially moving for



Dan Feldner/MDN

Terri Bell, right, and her daughter, Stephanie, both of Deering, admire the photographs that comprise the "Visions of Valor" exhibit located in the North Dakota State Fair Center Friday afternoon. The exhibit includes 24 black and white photographs of Medal of Honor recipients taken by photographer Nick Del Calzo.

the Bells because of the rich military tradition in their family. Stephanie Bell

said both her mother and father served in the military, and that kind of life is all she's ever known. With all of the conflicts the United States is involved in around the world, she said that the military isn't always looked upon in the kindest light. This display, she noted, shows that there are still people out there who are proud of the men and women who serve our country.

"This shows that people still have pride. ... So it's just something that shows a lot of respect and love towards (military

personnel). That's how I feel," Bell said. The exhibit is owned by TriWest Healthcare Alliance, a company that partners with the Department of Defense to serve the health-care needs of military families. Kerby Hertz, clinical liaison nurse at TriWest Healthcare Alliance, said this is the first time the exhibit has been in North Dakota.

Hertz said TriWest acquired two collections of photographs in 2005 that serve as the material for the exhibit. There are actually two exhibits — the traveling one currently in Minot and another one that's on permanent display at the Pentagon. There are 140 photographs in each collection, of which 24 are being shown in Minot.

The photographs were taken by photographer Nick Del Calzo, and are part of a book he wrote with Peter Collier. The book, "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty," is filled with portraits of many of the living Medal of Honor recipients and contains a brief background on each one. The book is displayed along with the photographs at the State Fair Center. Hertz noted that anyone who wishes to purchase a copy of the book can probably find it at local book stores, or online at a number of booksellers.

Twenty four pictures hang on the simple black walls that provide a backdrop for the exhibit. Included among those pictures is one of Michael John Fitzmaurice, the only living Medal of Honor recipient from North Dakota. The inclusion of recipients from North Dakota wasn't accidental.

Since space is a very real constraint wherever the exhibit goes, not all 140

photographs can usually be shown. Hertz said that a committee looks at each site and determines how many photographs can be shown. Then they try to pick ones that have some connection with the area.

"We're doing this because we want to promote the legacy of these heroes," Hertz said.

The exhibit has a very real connection with Minot because of the Medal of Honor Memorial dedicated on July 4 in Roosevelt Park. The timing of the exhibit coming to Minot wasn't accidental, either. Hertz, who just happens to be a member of the Medal of Honor Committee that helped the memorial in Roosevelt Park get off the ground, said he mentioned the "Visions of Valor" exhibit to other committee members and things took off from there.

The exhibit was officially unveiled at the State Fair Center on July 4 at 10 a.m. Many of the same dignitaries attended the "Visions of Valor" unveiling and the Medal of Honor Memorial dedication later that afternoon, including Medal of Honor recipient Fitzmaurice and Rear Admiral Michael H. Miller, a Minot native.

"It's a great way to help segue into that memorial," Hertz said. "That's why ('Visions of Valor') is here now."

Hertz doesn't believe there are any other exhibits like this, and he said this is the first time it has been in North Dakota. With the state fair in town, he hopes as many people as possible get to see the exhibit, and that it leads them to seek out the memorial in Roosevelt Park as well.

"It's ('Visions of Valor') very unique

and very nice that the state fair let us bring it here,” Hertz said.

While this is the first time the exhibit has been in North Dakota, Hertz hopes it won't be the last. He said that they are working on getting the exhibit shown at the state Capitol in Bismarck this fall. While the legislature wouldn't be in session, he noted that it would make for a great field trip for children going back to school.

Although only 24 of the 140 photographs are being shown, it is still a powerful display that puts a face on an award that is mostly myth and legend to the average American citizen.

“It makes it real,” Hertz said. “That this group of heroes is few and far between.”

“Visions of Valor” will be on display at the State Fair Center through Saturday, July 28, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.