

Museum salutes U.P. iron industry

By JAMES LAKE
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NEGAUNEE — Much of the steel made into tanks, ships and rifles used in World War II started as ore mined right here in Marquette County's iron range.

To help bring attention to that fact, and the men and women who helped supply it, on Saturday the Michigan Iron Industry Museum in Negaunee Township presented the program "Shield of Steel: Iron Ore and the Arsenal of Democracy." The program, complete with a recreated World War II encampment, continues from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. today.

Museum Manager Thomas Friggens said Michigan ore went into trucks, howitzers, warships and bombs.

"The mines of Lake Superior produced 90 percent of America's iron ore supply," he said. "Not once during the war was that iron ore supply interrupted."

That supply, coupled with Michigan's automotive industry's switch to military production, helped win the war for the Allied forces.

"It was the production capacity of the U.S. that did as much to crack the back of the Axis forces as the soldiers on the front line," Friggens said. "So often that is

overlooked."

The museum also has two other similar programs, "Iron, Steel and the Automobile," and "Iron Ore and the Civil War."

"All of them focus on how this industry, this resource and these people helped shape this nation," Friggens said.



FRIGGENS

The area's contribution to the Arsenal of Democracy will become a part of

the museum's \$1.8 million expansion, planned for construction next year.

All of the permanent exhibits are complemented by the live-action special programs, Friggens said.

As visitors enter the museum property, they're met with a re-enactment of a World War II camp, staffed by history buffs in uniforms who are ready to answer questions. Parked outside are a large truck and a tracked winter vehicle called a "weasel."

Ethan Barnett, one of the re-enactors from downstate Grand Haven, said the sharing of infor-

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Joni Burgess of downstate Wyandotte traces a pinup girl on the back of a 41 field jacket, as many World War II soldiers did. Burgess was one of several WWII re-enactors at the Michigan Iron Industry Museum Saturday, bringing the era to life for museum visitors. (Journal photo by James Lake)



Andy and Jim Manty of Ishpeming look over a World War II jeep at the Michigan Iron Industry Museum Saturday. The jeep was on display as part of a special "Shield of Steel" program, highlighting the Marquette Iron Range's role in supplying armaments during wartime. (Journal photo by James Lake)

Museum

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mation at these displays is a two-way street.

"We all like history," Barnett said. "We learn a lot at events like this because veterans stop by and share their experiences."

Right outside the museum building, the Keweenaw Swing Band performed while Northern Michigan University Swing Club dancers showed off the steps of the era.

Inside, Joni Burgess of downstate Wyandotte, presented "The Home Front: A Portrait of Working Women in World War II."

Burgess was followed by Rick Plummer, a professor of theater at

West Shore Community College in downstate Scottville. Plummer's one-man show, "Live from the Front: Byline Ernie Pyle," outlines the World War II coverage from the famous correspondent.

"People waited to hear what Ernie wrote about their sons, their husbands and their brothers, because they knew they were getting the straight skinny from Ernie," Plummer said.

Plummer, who served two tours in Vietnam, said he wrote the play to honor his father, a World War II combat veteran.

"It's easy to call them the Greatest Generation," he said. "They did nothing short of saving the world and rebuilding America."

Spencer and Arleen Felt of Na-

tional Mine were among dozens who visited the exhibits Saturday. Spencer served in the Navy during World War II, operating landing craft.

Both thought that while the reenactments couldn't completely represent what the soldiers faced, it was close enough to give the later generations some idea.

"If you don't keep the history alive, our children won't remember," Arleen said.

The displays continue today beginning at 9:30 a.m. At 1:30 p.m., Plummer will again give his performance about Pyle, and at 3:30 p.m. Michael Deren will give a performance called "CCC Enrollee of 1941."

There is no charge for admission.