



COMPASS

HORIZONS HAMPTON ROADS

PROGRAM TAKES AIM AT SUMMER SLIDE IN LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

By Nicole Alvarado
Correspondent

During the school year, Norfolk Collegiate School is a private institution for grades K-12. During the summer, the school becomes an academic playground when it is taken over by the Horizons Hampton Roads summer-enrichment program for low-income public school students.

"I like to think of us as a carnival," Dick Trowbridge, executive director of the program said. "We have these tubs of material off-site. Classes start, we come in and unload all our stuff, set-

the right moves

A close-up on Kala Dawson, chess instructor for Championship Chess. **Page 8**

up, take over the schools, basically, then at the end of the summer, we pack up and leave and it's like we weren't even there."

More than 350 students from 51 Norfolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach public schools attend the six-week summer program on the

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PHOTO COURTESY DICK TROWBRIDGE

Horizons mentor, eighth-grader Nathaniel Hankerson shares a story with kindergarten Allen Fleming at Chesapeake Bay Academy campus.

NAUTICUS EXHIBIT

Pop's WWII journal speaks for sailors on Wisconsin

By Gary Ruegsegger
Correspondent

When Arvel August Phifer penned his World War II journal, he had no idea he'd one day become the voice of the battleship Wisconsin's captain and crew.

Today, prominently featured in a new Nauticus display, the words of the then 33-year-old sailor welcome guests aboard the 887-foot Iowa-class battleship.

Dubbed "Pop" by his shipmates, Phifer guided the younger sailors through the shoals of war. The familial nickname stuck for the rest of his life.

"Pop was kind-hearted, fun-loving and would do anything for another person who needed his help," said his granddaughter Gayla Phifer Stout.

Eight years ago, Stout found the journal among her grandfather's papers. The family donated his writings to the Hampton Roads Naval Museum.

Stephen Kirkland, 41, assistant executive director of Nauticus, was poring over stacks of documents recently and found the journal. He decided to build the new display on the foundation of Phifer's words.

"We're in the business of tell-



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAYLA PHIFER STOUT

Arvel Phifer walked the red carpet aboard the battleship Wisconsin Dec. 7, 2000. His wife of 73 years, Elizabeth, accompanied him despite being told by security that the space was reserved for veterans.

ing stories and something about this journal just struck my heart," said Kirkland.

"Arvel is representative of all the sailors who served on that ship. Through his voice, we tell a better story."

Phifer enlisted in the Navy after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, leaving his wife and two children in North Carolina. For the rest of the war, the Wisconsin would be his home, and his writ-

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ing desk would preserve its memory.

Dec. 17, 1944

Bad storm today, could not even fuel destroyers, No operations today. Ran into a typhoon.

"He just wrote what was on his mind and in his heart," his son John C. Phifer Sr. said.

"Over the years, he never left the ship, and the ship never left him."

Launched on Dec. 7, 1943, the second anniversary of Pearl Harbor, the Wisconsin served in three wars and was decommissioned three times.

The dreadnought was last reactivated Aug. 1, 1986, Arvel's 75th birthday.

Feb. 23, 1945

Refueled off Iwo Jima, heading back to Tokyo area. We are losing a hell of a lot of men on Iwo Jima. 600 died. 4100 wounded.

"He was a good man, but just a plain and simple man," his daughter Jane Phifer Dern said.

"I suspect most of the crew was just like him - unremarkable men who did remarkable things."

April 13, 1945

Toyko Rose just broadcast that this was going to be an unlucky day for us. This is Friday the 13th... I have just heard that President Roosevelt died last night. This is a hard blow for the Armed Services.



GARY RUEGSEGGER

Members of Arvel Phifer's family gathered at the battleship Wisconsin to honor him on what would be his 102nd birthday. Left to right: Brian Barnett, Chad Hollins, Stacy Barnett, John Phifer Sr. (son), Bess Phifer, Ann Phifer Dern (daughter), Jane Dern, Janet Phifer, Gayla Phifer Stout, Ben Phifer and John Phifer Jr.

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on the Web www.nauticus.org/

When the Wisconsin was towed to its permanent berth next to Nauticus on Dec. 7, 2000, Arvel Phifer walked to the gang plank alongside Elizabeth, his wife of 73 years, with "his chest puffed out," his granddaughter recalled.

When a security guard told

his wife the reserved area was for veterans only, she informed him: "I was with him before the battleship and I'm not leaving his side today."

"Yes, ma'am," the guard meekly replied.

During Phifer's 18 months aboard the battleship in World War II, the Wisconsin earned five battle stars. A sixth battle star was earned during the Korean War.

"He was so proud to serve his country alongside the men of the Wisconsin," Stout said.

"The three most important things in [my] life," he told his granddaughter "are

Jesus Christ first, the Apostles second and the crew of the USS Wisconsin."

When Phifer died on Nov. 13, 2007, he left a son and a daughter, four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

"I feel his spirit every time I see an American flag flying in the breeze," Stout said.

Fittingly, on August 1, the family drove to Norfolk to commemorate his 102nd birthday aboard the Wisconsin.

Gary Ruegsegger, gruegseg@gmail.com

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