

Franklin County Honor Flight

GUARDIAN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

This is your primary job -- You are to care for the Veterans as if they were family members.

Honor Flight gets multiple calls from anxious wives, daughters, sons, and grand kids wanting to accompany the veteran so they can be sure they will be well cared for. We have assured them all that our Guardians will care for them like family. Ratios vary depending on conditions, but normally one Guardian is responsible for two Veterans, sometimes three Guardians per eight Veterans, and usually one Guardian for one Veteran if he or she is in a wheelchair, requires oxygen, or has some other special need. Guardians are divided into groups and each group has a Team Captain. To help with the process of building bonding relationships for the trip and afterward, Guardians and Veterans should get to know each other as much as possible before the trip.

1. Safety is our main concern. Our worst nightmare would be for a Veteran to fall on our watch and fracture a hip. In an 80 year-old, a hip fracture is usually a death sentence. Be alert for any Veteran who is having difficulty walking and have them sit down immediately. Notify your Team Captain who will get them a wheelchair as soon as possible. Assist the Veterans in getting around the airports, on and off the bus, and around the memorials. You will have to watch some Veterans closer than others. Be particularly alert for this toward the end of the day when fatigue is high.
2. Inform your Team Captain immediately if any Veteran is complaining of fatigue, chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, or seems confused. It is suggested that you identify in advance the people who are most knowledgeable on medical issues as we try to place someone with first aid training in each group. Check the bus, airplane, waiting areas, and wherever the Veterans sit, to make sure that they do not accidentally leave their wallet, glasses, cell phone, camera, etc. behind.
3. You may come in contact with news media who want an interview. Please identify those articulate, talkative Veterans in your group that would be at ease during an interview, and steer the media to those individuals. Will Rogers once said, "We can't all be heroes. Some of us have to stand on the curb and clap as they go by." The Honor Flight program, at its best, will never be anything more than a group of dedicated individuals clapping as the real heroes go by. This is their "last hurrah" and the spot light is on them.
4. Be a focal point to stir conversation within a group of Veterans. You can spark a conversation by asking who served in the Pacific, Europe, in the United States and elsewhere; who was in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Merchant Marines. Ask the Veterans if they brought any mementos or photographs with them. A great conversation starter is, "How was the food during WWII? The Veterans will usually take over the conversation from there. (In the preparation stages of the trip, along with reminding them what to bring like a photo ID, and what not to bring like a pocket knife, you can suggest they bring along a few photos from the war. In addition to sharing them with their reconnected buddies, they can show them to the media who like to take pictures of the photos and use them in their articles. (It's a good idea to bring copies and leave the originals back home in case they get lost.)
5. We have contacted many Veterans who have previously taken the trip with us. When we ask them what was the most memorable part of their trip, the answer is always the same - it was the appreciation, admiration and sincere gratitude shown to them for their service by complete strangers, youngsters and other tourists. That memory will remain with them for the rest of their lives and be passed on to family members. You can help foster that recognition by recognizing them for their service in front of others who happen to be within earshot of your conversation.
6. During the trip, do not accept any donations to our program by any Veterans, other passengers or tourists. Politely inform the Veterans that they can never make a donation to Honor Flight because we feel that they have already given enough. Any non-Veteran who would like to make a contribution can do so by contacting Franklin County Honor Flight at 636-583-4242. Business cards will be given to every Guardian for handing out to Veterans and to those that request more information.
7. Perform a headcount of your Veterans at requested times; usually prior to boarding the aircraft and buses.

8. Do not permit the Veterans to pay for anything during the trip except for souvenirs they want to take home. If you see a Veteran trying to pay for food or drink, or to tip a sky cap or bus driver, please stop them and you purchase the item/s or pay the tip. Let your Team Captain know how much you spent and you will be reimbursed.
9. Encourage the Veterans to take LOTS of photographs during the trip, in the waiting areas, on the plane, on the bus, and of course at the memorials. Offer to take their photograph with their cameras. At the end of the day, there should not be any film left in the camera. If you notice a Veteran does NOT have a camera, notify a Team Captain and they will provide them a disposable one. After the Veteran has passed away, these photographs will likely be some of the most treasured pictures for the surviving family members. Take lots of pictures with your own camera, if possible, and post them on the website so computer-savvy Veterans can access them after the trip. Some Veterans may not be able to access the website or won't be able to print the pictures and may prefer that you send them a CD or hard-copy photos. Franklin County Honor Flight can help get these copies made. Even better, a video recording captures more detail including voices and helps make the trip more memorable for the Veterans and provides the family members with many hours of pleasure. We all remember those 8mm movies from yesteryear that didn't seem to be worth much at the time, but became gems when the years moved on and memories faded.
10. Make sure that every Veteran on your team gets something to eat. Meal time is also a great time to remind Veterans to take their medication/s as needed. Identify those Veterans on your team who did not get breakfast or dinner. Honor Flight will pay for their meals at the airport. Box lunches will be provided for everyone at the memorial (Guardians included).
11. Listen and provide a sympathetic ear. During the tour, you might hear Veterans talking about their combat experience or friends they have lost. For some Veterans, this might be the first time they have ever talked about some negative experiences. If this happens, don't feel that you have to make a comment - just listen and thank them for sharing their stories with you. You might ask them if they have shared their combat experience with their family. If not, encourage them to pass down their stories to their loved ones as a legacy—an oral history—of their service. Traveling 80 y/o people do not like to drink when they travel because of bladder control problems. You MUST encourage them to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day and inform them that bathrooms are available on the airplane, on the tour bus, at the memorials and throughout the airports. Personal hygiene items (wipes, Depends) are also available to Veterans and Guardians. It is a good idea to mention the availability of these personal items up front so the Veteran is not embarrassed later by not knowing and not wanting to ask.
12. Keep a journal as the notes will be especially meaningful later to you and the Veterans. Every Veteran has a story to tell. This may be the first time they've opened up to anyone. Veterans will feed memories to each other and remind each other of things long forgotten and unspoken. Two Veterans who have never talked about the past may confide in each other and turn into chatter-boxes when together!
13. All Guardians are asked to carry a card with the cell phone numbers of all other Guardians and Team Captains so they can contact each other during the day as the need arises. Also, several Guardians need to get off of the bus first to get the wheelchairs ready and to help the Veterans get off the bus safely. Shaking the Veteran's hand as he/she gets off and welcoming him to wherever you are is a good way to help those who don't think they need any help. Similarly, a few guardians need to board the bus first and a guardian must be behind every vet as they board the bus (soft landing if they fall).

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