

Tinker thanks 'Rosies' with special event

2nd Lt. Lee Ann Mohjerin - Office of Public Affairs

Soldiers dressed in vintage World War II uniforms standing near their 1942 Army jeeps and walls adorned with posters depicting days gone by greeted Tinker Management Association members as they gathered to honor "Rosie the Riveter" Nov. 8.

What was originally scheduled as a typical TMA luncheon turned out to be an afternoon spent recognizing the women who worked to support the war effort in the 1940s. At the height of the war, thousands of workers filled Tinker Field and the Douglas Aircraft Corporation to manufacture aircraft from the ground up - supplying American soldiers with fresh warfighting equipment.

One former "Rosie the Riveter," Katie Grant, said despite the challenges working women faced, it was something they had to do. "They took all of our young men away to fight. We had to do something because we were determined to win the war - and we did." Elizabeth Ward, Aircraft Management Directorate, masterminded the event. She became a modern-day "Rosie" herself in 1989 when she began working at Tinker. "When I came to work, I had three children and it was hard. I kept thinking, 'How did the women of World War II do the same thing while facing rationing and without modern conveniences like today's washing machines?'"

She was determined to meet these women and learn about their experiences. "After talking with them, they simply became my heroes," Ward said. "I just had to find some way to honor them."

The Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center Public Affairs Office and TMA hosted the luncheon.

Dana Aberle, TMA president, said he was glad to support the event. "The 'Rosies' helped make Tinker what it is today. It is a win-win situation when we can work with the rest of the base to recognize those that helped create our heritage."

More than 80 Rosies, ranging from 75 to 98 years old, took part in the ceremony honoring their contributions to America.

"I have found that a hero's love for her country never fades," Ward said. "This was the opportunity for her country to say 'You are important' and 'Thank you!'"

"I have never been recognized for doing my part in World War II," honoree Bethel Harris said. "This is absolutely wonderful."

The luncheon included vintage World War II displays provided by members of the 45th Infantry Division Museum, a slide show depicting Rosies of past and present and a video featuring first-hand accounts of work on the production line. Tables laden with memorabilia, much of it from Ward's personal collection, reminded the Rosies of times gone by.

"I wanted to create public awareness and let others know what these women had done for our country," explained Ward.

Brenda Reneau Wynn, Oklahoma's first female commissioner of labor and keynote speaker for the event, expressed her gratitude for the doors opened by the work of Rosies.

"These capable women stepped into World War II to fill a great void in our country," Reneau Wynn said. "These women forever transformed economic, social and political conditions of women in our country today. Thank you for the road that you paved for others."

Maj. Gen. L.D. Johnston, Air Warfare Center commander, Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., made the trip to Oklahoma to accompany his mother, a former "Rosie," to the luncheon.

"It is no surprise to me that my mama was a 'Rosie,'" Johnston said. "It makes me extremely proud that the greatest generation was made of people like my mama who went off to make the war work."

A message from Gov. Frank Keating, who could not attend, proclaiming Nov. 8, 2001 as "Rosie the Riveter Day" for the state of Oklahoma, brought the program to a close with thundering applause.

"We all did our part, and I mean everybody," June Douglas, a former "Rosie," said. "We can do it again, too. We're Americans - we do what we have to. We always have."