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ALWAYS LOST

Putting Face, Names to War

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The national traveling exhibit, "Always Lost: A Meditation on War," will be at the Mesabi Community & Technical College's Virginia campus from Thursday through March 21. A grand opening will be held from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday in the Library Gallery. The exhibit includes a collection of Pulitzer Prize-winning photography and artifacts illustrating the experiences of those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.



ANGIE RIEBE STAFF WRITER

VIRGINIA — The faces of more than 6,500 American service men and service women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming to Virginia.

But the nationally traveling exhibit soon on display at the Mesabi Range Community & Technical College goes beyond the poignant "wall of photos," said Dean of Student Affairs David Dailey. "Always Lost: A Meditation on War" is about "emotion and feelings and the shared experience of these veterans through words and combat experiences," he said.

In addition to the Wall of the Dead — which depicts the faces of all U.S. military war casualties since Sept. 11, 2001 — the exhibition features Pulitzer Prize-winning photography and creative writings that honor and illustrate the ordeals of those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

"It's a powerful experience that is authentic and meaningful," Dailey said. "I don't know if anyone who walks in walks out feeling the same way about what vets did for us."

The arts and humanities exhibit, which originated at Western Nevada College, will be on display Thursday through March 21 at the Mesabi Range's Virginia campus Library Gallery. Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is free and open to the public.

A grand opening event will be held from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday. Barb O'Reilly, director of Women Veteran and Employment Programs at the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs and past commander of the 147th Personnel Services Battalion, will speak. Refreshments will be served.

Dailey said he learned of the exhibit from local resident Cheryl Softich, mother of Noah Pierce, who served in Iraq and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. The exhibit includes poetry written by the soldier, who took his life in the summer of 2007.

"As we spoke, she told me how powerful the exhibit is," Dailey said. "Moreover, how meaningful it would be to her, and her son's memory, if Mesabi Range College could exhibit this work."

MRC&TC partnered with Western Nevada College to bring the exhibit to the community, he said. "Mesabi Range College is truly humbled in our efforts to pay tribute to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice."

The display "takes up the entire gallery" at the Virginia campus, Dailey said. Mesabi Range is the first college in-state to host it.

"It's very moving," said Dailey, son of a wounded veteran. While he was emotionally invested in the project for personal reasons, he said, the display puts a face and a name to the casualties of war and will surely affect everyone who views it, including students, veterans and the public.

Invites were sent to area American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and to the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon network, he said. Attendees "will be able to identify local connections," Dailey said.

"It's a humbling and gratifying experience to bring the exhibit to Virginia and the Northland," he said. "If people want to see an exhibit that is done with exceptional class and solemn pride for veterans, they are going to want to come and take a look at it."