

Veterans become funeral home's mission

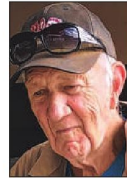
*Elgin facility will lay
a second 'unclaimed'
vet to rest, help others*

BY ELENA FERRARIN

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The owners of an Elgin funeral home that sparked an outpouring of support for an "unclaimed veteran" in late January will hold another such funeral Wednesday, and have also launched an initiative to continue supporting veterans in the area.

Dan and Joy Symonds are inviting the community



**Ronald
George Olson**

to the funeral of Ronald "Ron" George Olson of Elgin, who served from 1959 to 1961 as a U.S. Army combat engineer with Company

C, 34th Engineering Battalion. Olson, 83, died on Feb. 6. He had friends, but his only daughter and his son-in-law died before him and no one else stepped forward to organize his funeral, Joy Symonds said. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides some reimbursement to funeral homes if veterans have been honorably discharged.

Olson's visitation will be at 10 a.m. followed by a funeral at 11 a.m. Wednesday at Symonds-Madison Funeral Home, 305 Park St. The Rev. Tim Perry of Elgin, of the non-profit Nationwide Chaplain Services, will officiate, just as he did Jan. 29 for unclaimed veteran John James Murphy, whose funeral was attended by hundreds of people after news spread on social media.

"We had a lot of conversations with people saying, 'This is amazing. We're so glad you did it,'" Joy Symonds said of Murphy's funeral. "But in the next breath it was, 'Why couldn't we have been there before he died?' That's a legitimate question."

So, the Symonds decided to launch Operation LOVE,

Veterans: Group has Facebook page

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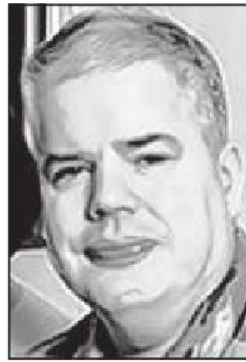
which stands for “Love Our Veterans Elgin.” Its mission is to create a community of people who want to honor unclaimed veterans, volunteer to help Elgin-area veterans in need, and take part in events, service opportunities and fundraisers done by veterans service organizations.

“It’s basically the concept of creating an online community to keep people engaged and connect them with opportunities to give,” Joy Symonds said. “I am seeing it as a megaphone to help veterans.”

Anyone interested in joining can visit the Operation LOVE — Love Our Veterans Elgin Facebook group or call the funeral home at (847) 741-1128.

Two things that happened after Murphy’s funeral helped the idea come together, the Symonds explained.

First, a social worker from Avantara, a rehabilitation/nursing home in Elgin, called the Symonds to say Olson, one of its residents, was an unclaimed veteran nearing the end of his life. The social worker asked the couple if they would help organize the funeral. Then, two sisters who attended Murphy’s funeral, Debbie VanOchten,



Dan Symonds



Joy Symonds

of Marengo, and Marge Brandow, of Harvard, contacted the Symonds to inquire about more opportunities to help veterans.

The result was that Dan Symonds and the sisters ended up visiting Olson, separately, at Amita Health St. Joseph Hospital in Elgin. Even though Olson was barely conscious, the experience was meaningful, they said.

“We held his hand. We just kind of talked and let him know he wasn’t alone, and how much we appreciate his service,” said VanOchten, whose brother died in Vietnam.

Dan Symonds said that, while his job as funeral home director is to help families after a loved one dies, it’s important for everyone to have the chance to be comforted in their final days. “I know he (Olson) felt relieved. I hope that’s what happened,” he said.