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Nearly 200 Gather to Honor Bristol Pearl Harbor Survivor Ed Riccio, Jr. at 6th Annual Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open

Farmington, Conn., October 6, 2014 – Ed Riccio, Jr. slowly approached the large pavilion at Tunxis Plantation Country Club in Farmington, appropriately decked out in red, white and blue, and quipped, “This place reminds me of a hangar at Pearl Harbor, big enough for me to land a plane in!”

There were no planes in sight at the Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open on Thursday, October 2. But there was plenty of admiration and respect in the room for the 94-year-old Bristol native and resident, a Pearl Harbor survivor with a distinguished record of service in World War II.

Riccio was the guest of honor at the 6th annual affair, hosted by Hardware City Chapter 8 of the Disabled American Veterans and presented by Farmington Bank. Nearly 150 golfers and almost 200 guests, including newly confirmed U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs and former Connecticut VA Commissioner Linda Schwartz as well as Bristol and New Britain Mayors Ken Cockayne and Erin Stewart, were on hand to raise dollars for veterans’ causes and to honor Riccio.

A stream of well-wishers lined up at the Riccio family table prior to the post-golf ceremony, all eager to shake the hand of an American legend. Riccio obliged them all, and when he finally got the chance to speak, said simply, “You know, I was just a guy doing his job like so many others in World War II. I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time – and was lucky to survive.”

In introducing Riccio, tournament founder and director Dennis Buden relayed the remarkable stories of Riccio’s wartime experiences. On the morning of December 7, 1941, Riccio awoke to the sound of bombs exploding. He was literally blown out of his barracks of 60 men, and was one of only three barracks comrades to survive.

Later in the war, Riccio was a crew member aboard a B-17 bomber on a reconnaissance mission in the South Pacific. The mission was aborted when the Japanese attacked, blowing open a huge gash in the front of the aircraft and killing all aboard – except for Riccio. Riccio, not a pilot, nevertheless managed to miraculously crash-land the plane on Guadalcanal.

“The most remarkable part of this story,” Buden told the crowd, “is that when Mr. Riccio, in his hospital bed, was offered the chance to return home, he said, ‘no thank you.’ He preferred not to escape to the safety of American soil, but to stay with his comrades and go on to flight school.

“This speaks to this American hero’s true character.”

Riccio spoke eloquently to the gathering, and quickly changed the topic from his record of service to the reason for the event – the raising of funds for the DAV, House of Heroes Connecticut and Friends of Fisher House Connecticut, among other causes. Some \$1,000 of the event’s proceeds are earmarked to the veterans’ cause of Riccio’s choice – and he chose the Disabled American Veterans.

“I really can’t believe all this is for me,” he said. “But I’m so glad to be here and to have the opportunity to dedicate funds to a great veterans’ service organization, the DAV.”

Tournament officials have not yet announced how much was raised for its chosen charities, but did say that they expect to easily surpass last year’s record \$10,000. Should that guesstimate prove accurate, the event will have raised nearly \$40,000 for Connecticut veterans over the past six years.

“This event continues to grow by leaps and bounds and is now perhaps the largest veterans’ charity golf event in the region,” said Buden. “We fully expect to go well beyond the \$50,000 mark in dollars raised at next year’s outing.”

Additional major sponsors of the Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open included Stanley Black & Decker, the Starlight Program at Stonington Institute, AT&T Connecticut, the Petit Family Foundation, the Tomasso Group, Okay Industries, the Hospital of Central Connecticut, Bourdon Forge, the Creed Law Firm and Sir Speedy Printing and Marketing Services of New Britain.

For more information on the Golden Kielbasa Veterans Open, please contact Tournament Founder and Director Dennis Buden at dennis@goldenkielbasa.org or 860-558-0514, or visit www.goldenkielbasa.org.

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