

Collier County capturing the story before it fades away

By Marci-Nicole Seamples
Staff Writer

One of the privileges of living in this day and age is the ability to record our history as it happens. Advanced technology has made the documentation of the present and recent past easier to record in a more accurate fashion than any other time in our collective past.

But with privilege comes great responsibility. In this instance, the responsibility is to record our history before it passes from the earth forever. This is the task set before Sandra Arnold, public information officer for the Collier County Communication and Customer Relations Department.

It began in this way: While attending a luncheon last year, Arnold, a veteran of the United States Navy, had the opportunity to hear two World War II veterans tell their tales. The response from the crowd was overwhelmingly emotional – the attendees were touched by the stories of those who fought so valiantly for our freedom.

World War II is a critical component of the history of the 20th century. The problem is we are slowly losing our World War II veterans and with them their personal accounts of those dark days, Arnold said.

Aware of this reality, Arnold approached her department with an idea - why not interview as many Collier County World War II veterans as possible and turn them into a living history archive? Her proposal was quickly approved and the effort began.

The easy part was finding out how many veterans are in Col-



Sandra Arnold, public information officer for the Collier County Communication and Customer Relations Department, speaks to the Kiwanis Club of East Naples on July 8. Greg Speers/Staff

lier County. They number about 35,000 – but it is unknown during which war they served. The first task was to find the World War II veterans from that number.

So far 20 veterans have been interviewed. Arnold hopes to complete and edit at least 60 interviews by December. There is a five-member volunteer team conducting interviews.

“What we find are most veterans are very modest,” says Arnold. “Most talk about their time at war in a matter of fact fashion – they did what they needed to do to protect their country and those at home they love.”

The interviews do not focus on any particular battle. Rather, the intent is to find out their personal stories – where they were stationed, where were

their families, what happened to them specifically while they were serving.

The interviews are being recorded on tape and will be housed at International College. The collection will also include materials, such as letters of deceased veterans. The only criteria to be included in the collection is the participant must be a Collier County resident and a World War II veteran, a Red Cross volunteer or a civilian directly related to the World War II effort.

There is still time to nominate a veteran to be interviewed. For a nomination form, contact the Collier County Communications and Customer Relations Department at 774-8308 or on the Web at www.co.collier.fl.us/communications/.