



Hollister Girl Scout Creates Museum to Honor Local Veterans

*Sommer Salinas earns her Girl Scout Gold Award
with the project, "Hollister Veterans of Foreign Wars Museum"*

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Sommer Salinas grew up attending military events and helping out wherever she was needed. Her uncle is the Commander in Chief for the Hollister Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post 9242, and her family was the chosen Military Family of the Year in 2015 for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) event. One day while talking to her uncle, Sommer learned that someone was trying to put together a museum in the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall but never completed it. Considering that the area was used to teach children about military history, provide a space to read and watch movies, and for veterans to have meetings, Sommer decided to take on the project as her own.

"There is no museum for the veterans of Hollister anywhere in my city," Sommer said. "I have known for years what military families are like and why we should thank our military servicewomen and men for our freedom."

Where there was supposed to be a museum, at first looked more like a storage unit. Sommer knew that members of the community had donated materials for displays, but nothing had been done with them yet. She began by removing all of the items in the cabinets, sorting similar items, taking inventory of books and movies, and organizing loose photos. The room underwent a deep clean; Sommer removed unrepairable cabinets and unwanted furniture, mopped and vacuumed the floors, and reorganized the area. She looked up pictures of donated military medals to find out what branch of service they came from, what they were awarded for, and how to properly display them.

"I knew that the books and movies that were in the area could not be used properly because of other big materials stored in there," Sommer said. "If I could restore the museum then maybe more people would learn about veterans, the veterans could use the books and movies that were there for them, children could come for classes and veterans could use the open space for meetings. The room would be used as intended by the VFW."



Sommer continued to catalog and label loose photos, sort books by war era, and organize video materials. She replaced a deteriorating TV stand, repainted cabinets and bookshelves, repaired display cases, and framed photos and certificates. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit right in the middle of Sommer's project, she had to overcome a variety of obstacles and made adjustments around the building's schedule. Sommer worked during odd hours or took projects home to work on and was very grateful for the help of her family.

Besides a few small community donations, Sommer funded the project almost entirely on her own with money saved up from a job she had worked the previous year. The funds went towards paint, labels, frames, wall art, cleaning supplies, photo cases, furniture hardware, and more.

"I reached most of my goals despite the pandemic," Sommer said. "The most important goals were how to display Veteran's items, whether they be certificates, medals, or uniforms. I also needed to update the TV area to make sure it was a safe environment because the old lattice arch that was in place was not sturdy and the TV stand was falling apart. I found out something that I never knew that I would be able to do, which is using a hammer and nails to build something."

Future visitors to the museum will find informational posters about VFW, how to join, and the services offered when they enter. They'll notice a new TV and reading area with seating and an organized collection of materials. Sommer also added a 9/11 display, showcased donated military uniforms, and created a meeting space for both visiting students and VFW members.

"The museum is still not open because of the pandemic, but from what I've seen just by watching my uncle look around at the finished museum, even he did not know that there were so many items of history there," Sommer said. "I hope that all people who enter take the time to learn at least something about a hometown veteran. Maybe they will even find a relative because this is such a small town. I would love more items donated so we can possibly fill the whole room up."

Sommer hopes that the museum will be open by this upcoming Veteran's Day, but if not looks forward to Memorial Day 2021 to welcome visitors. She hopes that local veterans will utilize the space and materials and that each visitor leaves feeling inspired and having learned something new.

On completing her project, she said, "I learned that I am confident and passionate when it comes to doing something that involves the veterans in my community. I believe that the way the museum looks is the most successful part of it all. Everything came out beautifully, just the way I imagined it."

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About Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast

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their lives both in the moment and into the future. Girls participate in troops, individual projects, council events, day camps, resident camps and more. A variety of leadership, outdoor skills, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) based programs and events provide girls with opportunities to learn and explore in fun and informative ways. To join or volunteer in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara or Ventura County, visit: <http://www.girlscoutscoc.org>.