



# Italian American Heritage Club Of Hunterdon County

KEEPING OUR *Pride*, CELEBRATING OUR *Culture*, REMEMBERING OUR *Past*

## *Mural Honors Raritan Marine The life of John Basilone preserved in art*

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By Tina Perrotta, Staff Writer

BRIDGEWATER ~ When people close their eyes and think of John Basilone, a few things come to mind ~ his hometown of Raritan, the annual parade in his honor, and the word here.

But now people don't have to close their eyes to envision his life because it's depicted in a mural inside the Bridgewater-Raritan High School field house.

The mural was started Monday, July 12 and completed in three days with the help of four students and artists Jimm and Jeanne Burrif. The six spent nine-hour days painting three large sections of Basilone's life in a small hallway inside the field house.

"From our perspective the only issue was that it's not in a hallway and it's very difficult to photograph it. It's really in three panels; the first panel is Raritan and it is sunny because it represents his childhood. The middle section is very dark because it shows the jungles of Guadalcanal and the third section is again, bright and sunny, because it's the battle of Iwo Jima where he was killed," Jimm Burrif said. "I've noticed hundreds of people ~ especially boys from age 7 to 16 ~ have filed by and most of them have said, "Cool, look at that!" I think it was a good place to put the mural."

The four students who helped the Burrifs are either currently attending Bridgewater-Raritan High School or have graduated. They were chosen for their art background and worked side-by-side in a team effort to complete the project.

"They were wonderful, they all showed up on Monday morning and we had a full team. This is huge so there are big areas of ocean and forests," he said. "Everyone had to keep moving so that every piece had unity."

The 43-foot by 11-foot mural includes descriptive text as well as the vivid paintings. In his spare time Burrif is a military history buff so he was familiar with the settings Basilone encountered overseas and

used his knowledge when talking with the Turf Committee, the group organized to raise funds for the installation of artificial turf this summer at the adjacent Basilone Field.

"He submitted a sketch to us and it was fabulous," said Veronica Finlay, chairwoman of the Turf Committee. "He has the knowledge ~ he knew so much about it; the details needed in Basilone's uniform and the details of Iwo Jima. We consulted with two Marines and I must say, they were meticulous in looking over the sketch. So was John Pacifico who runs the annual Basilone Parade. All details are very accurate."

Pacifico, a Raritan native, has been the chairman of the Basilone parade for 16 years and knows the Basilone family. He also consulted them prior to the completion of the mural.

"I showed the sketches to Basilone's brother, Carlo, and he thinks it's a great idea. He wants to try to be present at the dedication ceremony September 10th," Pacifico said.

The Burrifs have worked together to create murals on the side of buildings and inside residential homes. Burrif graduated in 1983 from Pratt Institute in NY and has a background in illustration. His wife is co-owner of Fantastic Finishes of Clinton. She graduated from University of Bridgeport in CT, and was employed as an illustrator of romance book covers prior to starting her own business.

The mural may be paid for by the Somerset County Patriots. There will also be a stone memorial outside created by Greg Ryback of Bridgewater. The memorial stone will have a bronze plaque with the Navy Cross, Medal of Honor and the Purple Heart.

There will also be three additional plaques next to the wall by the concession stand: one large vertical plaque listing the requirements of the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross, and two smaller plaques holding the Certificates for those awards. 🌍