



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Ramapo College Freshman Helping to Preserve Veterans' Stories at Mahwah Museum

MAHWAH, N.J. -- In his first semester at Ramapo College, Bobby Ciarletta '24 is already beginning to make his mark as a civic-minded student. The Park Ridge, N.J., native is volunteering at the nearby Mahwah Museum on the Veterans Project, an initiative which compiles and archives the names and biographical information of local men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.

"Originally, I got involved with the Mahwah Museum because I wanted to volunteer, learn how a museum works, and see old historical documents. But I love the Veterans Project in particular, because I think it is important to preserve the stories of these men and women," said Bobby, a student in the College's Honors Program. "It's intriguing to compile their military history, but also discover the people themselves: life back at home, their interests, community involvement, and the words they've said. I get to stitch together the different parts of their lives, and put together biographies and narratives."

According to Cathy Moran Hajo, who serves as president and archives director at the Mahwah Museum, the project started out with historical research, using lists of Civil War veterans and those who died in World War I and World War II. However, there was no systematic information on those who served in more recent wars.

"We realized quickly that it was more important to capture the stories of the veterans who are still alive, so we pivoted to spearheading an effort to reach out to local veterans organizations and use the Museum's social media and website to solicit participation," Hajo said.

Bobby, she said, volunteered for the project even before taking his first class in September.

"Bobby is enthusiastic and a great researcher, using local newspapers and genealogical databases to pull together materials for short biographies on the veterans. He is also helping us

build more complete lists of our veterans and will help to interview and process the questionnaires we have been sending.”

The Veterans Project has been a mostly remote internship within Ramapo’s School of Humanities and Global Studies, with regular WebEx meetings and shared digital files.

Like many students across the country, Bobby said his freshman year at Ramapo has meant spending a lot of time online, affording him the opportunity to focus on the learning itself “with little to distract from that.”

“I also spend my spare time running on my own, taking photos in nature, praying -- stuff to keep me active and feeling peaceful and not stressed,” Bobby said, noting that the pandemic crisis gave him a chance to think about his life and “re-assess a bit” before starting college. “Though I can only see people virtually, some friends in Honors and also InterVarsity Christian Fellowship have been giving me that sense of community, too, which also helps a ton. I feel blessed that I was able to learn at Ramapo. The financial value is unmatched, and it positions me well to be a future teacher and educator. During my honors interview, the professors who were interviewing me really listened and made it feel personal.”

Hajo said the Mahwah Museum plans to build an archival collection that will include questionnaires, photographs, documents, and any recorded audio or video interviews. The Museum also hopes to mount the materials on its website with permission from the veterans, and to do some public programming.

More on the project can be found at <https://mahwahmuseum.org/mahwah-veteran-project/>

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state’s premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice, has been named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondéNast Traveler*, and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger’s*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on Niche.com, and is designated a “Military Friendly College” in Victoria Media’s *Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor’s degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master’s degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a post-master’s Doctor of Nursing Practice.

