

## **Chrysler Group's Toledo Assembly Plant Establishes Permanent Veteran's Memorial Featuring Toledo-built 1942 Willys Military Jeep®**

- Three Toledo plant retirees and WWII veterans join plant employees for dedication
- Vehicle restoration completed by Toledo plant employees
- Nearly 10 percent of Toledo workforce has military background
- Military population grows by 25 percent with Jeep Cherokee launch and recent hiring

May 28, 2014, Toledo, Ohio - As the nation pauses this Memorial Day to remember those who served in the United States Armed Services, Chrysler Group's Toledo Assembly Complex (TAC) unveiled its own special tribute to veterans around the country during a ceremony at the plant today.

Vice President of Assembly Operations Zach Leroux, TAC Plant Manager Chuck Padden, UAW Local 12 Chairman Mark Epley, employees and five veterans with ties to the Toledo plant, including three retirees who served in WWII, dedicated a permanent veteran's memorial in the shadow of the giant Jeep ® sign that identifies the plant at the

intersection of I-75 and I-280. Featuring a restored 1942 Willys Military Jeep, the memorial not only recognizes the service of those in uniform, but also the plant's nearly 75-year history of building Jeep vehicles, starting with production of the first military Jeep.

"Like all Americans, we owe our freedom to the sacrifices made by the men and women who serve in the military, but at Jeep, we owe our very existence to our WWII veterans," said Padden. "When they returned home from the war, they purchased civilian versions of the Jeep vehicles they learned to depend upon in the war. These heroes became our first Jeep enthusiasts. Without them, we would not be here today.

"But the Jeep legacy is not just about the vehicles; it is also about the people," said Padden. "Some of the people who currently work in this plant and some who helped refurbish this 1942 Jeep are descendants of those who possibly built this very vehicle. We have come a long way at the Toledo Jeep plant, so it's important to remind the new generation where it all started."

Plant management and the local UAW leadership agreed that the best way to honor veterans and the plant's Jeep history was to find a military Jeep to restore and put on permanent display. With the help of former Toledo plant manager Jerry Huber and a Craig's List ad, the 1942 Willys was found in Wimberley, Texas, a community 28 miles southwest of Austin. The vehicle was in fairly good shape, but didn't run. When the owner heard that the Jeep plant in Toledo wanted the vehicle to put on display, he immediately pulled the ad, sold it to the plant for \$950 and volunteered to transport it to Toledo in exchange for a tour.

The Willys returned home on May 9 and restoration work began on May 12. A team of about 15 Toledo employees worked for a week and a half to return the vehicle to its original condition, replacing parts, refurbishing body panels and painting the vehicle. Because all of the vehicle identification plates and hood graphics were removed, the exact history of the vehicle can't be determined, but the plant estimates that the vehicle was originally built in mid-1942.

The memorial also includes silhouettes of soldiers, created by volunteers from the plant. An assembly employee drew up the soldier outlines and body shop employees cut out the figures, ground the edges and finished them.

"With our deep military roots, it was especially important for this plant to establish a permanent way of paying our respects to those who have fought for the freedom we all enjoy," said the UAW's Epley. "With nearly 10 percent of our workforce with military experience, plus all of our team members with family members having served or still

serving, this memorial is very personal for all of us.”

The number of Toledo employees with a military background has grown by 25 percent with the launch of the Jeep Cherokee and the recent hiring.

### **About the Veterans**

Helping to dedicate the Toledo Assembly Complex’s Veteran’s Memorial were five veterans, all of whom with ties to the plant.

Twins Lewis and Leroy Woggon, 87, were hired by the Jeep plant in 1943. Three months later, they were drafted into the Army and served as combat engineers during WWII. They both served for three years, returning to work at the Jeep plant after they were discharged. Leroy retired in 1989 after 45 years with Jeep, but brother Lewis stayed on five more years, retiring in 1994. Leroy’s son Gary has been working at Jeep since 1983 and currently works in the Wrangler paint shop. Lewis’s son and grandson both retired from the Jeep plant.

John Smith served in the Army Infantry from 1945-1946. He was hired by Jeep in 1947 and spent the next 40 years building Jeep vehicles before retiring in 1985.

Ron Szymanski retired from the Jeep plant in 1998 following 35 years working in body, paint and assembly. He also served as the Jeep museum curator. Szymanski served in the Army National Guard from 1950-1955, then went to Officer Candidate School where he was Honorably Discharged in 1960 as a 1st Lieutenant Army Reserve Officer.

Lupe Flores, the 90-year-old cousin of Jeep retiree Hector Flores who serves on the Jeep Veterans Committee, served with the Army 101st Airborne from 1943-1946. He was involved in the D-Day Invasion in Normandy, France, and took part in two combat jumps during his time with the Army.

### **The History of Jeep in Toledo**

Toledo is known as the birthplace of Jeep. In 1940 as war spread through Europe, the United States Army determined that it needed a new type of fast, lightweight, all-terrain reconnaissance vehicle. The Army selected Toledo-based Willys-Overland for production of the vehicle, and the company began production in late 1941, building about 8,000 units that year. In total, 363,000 were built in Toledo through the end of the war in 1945.

The vehicle was officially known as the Willys MB, but not many people called it that. Before long, it became universally known as the Jeep, many believing that the name came from the term “GP,” for “General Purpose.”

The Jeep was an all-purpose vehicle and served in every theater of the war. It was used as a staff car, pickup truck, ambulance, reconnaissance vehicle, machine gun mount, ammunition bearer and a troop carrier.

After the war, Willys-Overland introduced a version for the general public, adding refined features such as windshield wipers, a tailgate and an outside gas cap. It was called the CJ-2A, with the “CJ” standing for “Civilian Jeep.” It became an icon because of its open-air look and tremendous off-road capabilities.

Other Jeep models followed, such as the first station wagon with four-wheel drive, and the Wagoneer, a pioneering sport-utility vehicle introduced in 1963. They were also built in Toledo.

Meanwhile, Jeep’s corporate ownership changed hands several times until Chrysler acquired the brand in 1987. Today, the Toledo Assembly Complex builds the Jeep Wrangler, Jeep Wrangler Unlimited and the all-new Jeep Cherokee with nearly 4,200 employees.

### **Jeep Brand**

Built on more than 80 years of legendary heritage, Jeep® is the authentic SUV brand that delivers legendary off-road capability, interior refinement, high-tech features and versatility to people who seek extraordinary journeys. The Jeep brand delivers an open invitation to live life to the fullest by offering a broad portfolio of vehicles that continues to provide owners with a sense of safety and security to handle any journey with confidence. Jeep Wave, a premium owner loyalty and customer care program that is available to the entire Jeep 4x4 lineup, is filled with benefits and exclusive perks to deliver Jeep brand owners the utmost care and dedicated 24/7 support. The legendary Jeep brand’s off-road capability is enhanced by a global electrification initiative that is transforming 4xe into the new 4x4. All

Jeep brand vehicles in North America will offer an electrified variant by 2025.

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