



Paul Overly of RD Mercer, left, has hosted former Navy personnel of the USS Des Moines, pictured in the foreground, at reunions at his home for the past 13 years. His son, Tim, right, also a former Navy man, has agreed to continue the reunion if his father becomes unable to head the project. Meals for the 300 former Navy men and the women in their lives and served in the tent in the background include hundreds of pieces of barbecued chicken prepared on several improvised grills and 80 gallons of Paul's special baked beans. (R-A photo by Tim O'Donnell)

USS Des Moines reunion attracts veterans from across the country

By TVONNE RAYMOND
R-A Lifestyles Editor

Serving together in the military can create a camaraderie that long outlasts active duty.

Two brothers, who served with the Navy on the heavy cruiser USS Des Moines in the Sixth Fleet during the Korean War years, decided it would be great to spend some time with their fellow Navy men.

Paul Overly, a truck driver who lives on Route 258 east of Clark, and his brother, Harry of Greensburg, who receives media attention each year with his expansive display of Christmas lights at his home, came up with the idea to have a reunion for all sailors who had served on the Des Moines during its service from 1948 through 1961.

Thirteen years ago, the first

USS Des Moines CA 134 reunion was hosted by Paul at his rural home, where those attending could use tents or campers to spend the weekend.

The gathering was such a hit that it has continued each year since then at the same location.

Some 300 veterans and their guests came from as far as Florida, Utah, Wyoming and California. In 1993, 35 states were represented in the crowd of 300 attending the reunion.

Some arrive about two weeks ahead of time to help in preparations; others stay a week or two after the weekend event to assist with cleanup.

Paul explained that everyone shares expenses and helps with what need to be done, including cooking for the crowd. He said everyone seems to get along very well.

Besides visiting and remi-

niscing, this year's schedule included a bus trip to Tara in Clark, a candy factory and the Avenue of Flags in Hermitage. An evening of live country-western music and an enviable display of professional fireworks kept guests entertained at the campsite.

Romance has edged its way into the reunion, too. Several years ago, a couple exchanged vows under an arched trellis on the Overly lawn during the reunion.

The groom from Michigan and his bride from Boston had planned to wed in 1948, but changed their minds. They went their separate ways, eventually marrying others.

Planning to attend the reunion revived memories of their

relationship for the widowed sailor, so he looked up his long-ago sweetheart, who husband had died.

After the spark of romance had rekindled, they agreed the reunion was an appropriate place to exchange vows.

Prints awarded

During the 1994 reunion last weekend, two of the 2,500 prints of an oil painting of the USS Des Moines created by Michael Donegan in 1948 were awarded.

The reunion has become an incorporated, non-profit organization with about 1,000 members. Paul estimates some 8,000 to 10,000 men served on the heavy gun board during its years of duty. All are welcome to become active members.