

Michigan WWII Japanese-American Veteran Shares Memoir *Blue Skies and Thunder*

What: Book reading with Virgil I. Westdale

Where: Creative 360 (formerly Creative Spirit Center) at 1517 Bayliss in Midland.

When: Saturday, May 1, 2010 / 2 – 3.30 pm

Cost: Free but pre-registration encouraged. Donations benefit the programs at Creative 360

For more information: Call (989) 837-1885 or visit www.becreative360.org

Midland – To kick off ArtFest55, a summer festival celebrating the creativity of people 55 and older, Creative 360 hosts Virgil Westdale of Grand Rapids on Saturday, May 1st. The 92-year-old, a native of Ada, Michigan, will talk about his experiences during World War II as he transitioned from Japanese-American Michigan farm boy to pilot, demoted to soldier because of his ancestry. He will read from his war memoir *Blue Skies and Thunder* and also describe his career as an inventor and his recent experiences in retirement as a consultant to the TSA, linking aviation and national security.

Westdale was honored on April 14 at the National Days of Remembrance ceremonies at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. One of 120 honorees, and the only one from Michigan, Westdale was honored as one of the liberators of the concentration camp at Dachau in 1945.

An excerpt from his book:

The Dachau prisoners took one look at our almond-shaped, black eyes and yellow skin and stepped back in fear. They thought they'd been freed from the Germans only to fall into the hands of the Japanese! They were terrified and were very reluctant to let us get close. It took some work to convince them that we were American soldiers. When they finally understood, they dropped to their knees and laughed and cried for joy.

"Virgil Westdale's Blue Skies and Thunder tells a story that is both unique in American history and uniquely American...His account is highly readable and offers insights into a wide range of aspects of both his own life and the world around him." -- Dr. James Smither, Director of the Grand Valley State University Veterans History Project

Copies of the book, with inscription by the author, will be available for purchase during the event. *Blue Skies and Thunder* is also available through amazon.com, Barnes and Noble or at:

<http://www.iuniverse.com/Bookstore/BookSearchResults.aspx?Search=virgil%20westdale>

About the writer:

In 1942, Virgil Westdale was a successful young flight instructor when the U.S. government ousted him from the Air Corps and demoted him to army private. Having grown up as a Japanese-American Michigan farm boy, Westdale had his first taste of Japanese culture when he was sent to train with the all Japanese-American unit, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He was ultimately transferred to the 522nd Artillery Battalion, where, as a member of the Fire Direction Center, he helped push the Germans out of Italy, rescue the "Lost Battalion" in France, and free prisoners from Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany.

After the war, Westdale went on to pursue a career in research and development with large corporations. He received twenty-five U.S. patents and earned an international award for his work with photocopier components. In retirement, he has been working for the TSA, returning to the worlds of aviation and national security. Written for the lay reader as well as the history buff, Westdale's stories of World War II challenge preconceived notions of what we think we know about a soldier's life in Europe and offer images that go beyond the history books.

About Creative 360:

Creative 360, formerly known as Creative Spirit Center, is a not-for-profit community arts and wellness organization founded in 1994. The Center's mission is to create an environment for people of all ages to experience the creative process through ongoing classes, art exhibits, events, concerts, speakers and outreach programs; and its goal is to enhance the development of physical, mental and spiritual wellness through the arts and humanities. Visit www.becreative360.org for more information about the offerings at Creative 360, or call (989) 837-1885 to request a mailed copy of the current schedule.

Creative 360 1517 Bayliss Street Midland, MI 48640 (989) 837-1885
fax: (989) 837-1817 www.becreative360.org

#####