

# BONGVHC

**#3**

**FEB/MAR/APR**

**TRAINING &  
LUNCH!**

Learn more about  
Korea and Vietnam

**ESCAPE THE  
BONG**

4 Escape rooms  
Beat the clock!

**SOARING  
BEYOND 100**

Pea-Shooter Pilot  
Prevails

RICHARD I.  
**BONG**  
VETERANS  
HISTORICAL  
CENTER

Photo credit: Randy Freeman

**OUR GOAL** is to honor the memory and legacy of Major Richard I. Bong, America's "Ace of Aces"  
To preserve and share the history of sacrifices from veterans of all branches of service.  
To educate about the contributions and sacrifices made by veterans which ensure the freedoms enjoyed today.

## 80TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY - YOU'RE INVITED FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>!

Crooning, cake, and camaraderie!

February 10th, 2025 will mark the 80th anniversary of Dick and Marge's, front page wedding. Come celebrate a remarkable day in the life of our Ace of Aces and his amazing bride.

We will begin our event with some songs of the era by the Time Arc Theatre singers down by the P-38 Marge and then come up to the classroom to enjoy cake and images from the wedding celebrated across all the social pages of the time!

We will talk about all things Bong Center including upcoming events, changes to membership and volunteer opportunities!



## ESCAPE THE BONG~ FEBRUARY 13-16<sup>TH</sup>

### 4 Room choices: Mascot, Jungle, Speakeasy or WWII Evade!

We are excited to announce Escape the Bong Center VII!

Every year we, along with Escape Room Parties LLC, provide interactive and immersive escape room experiences!

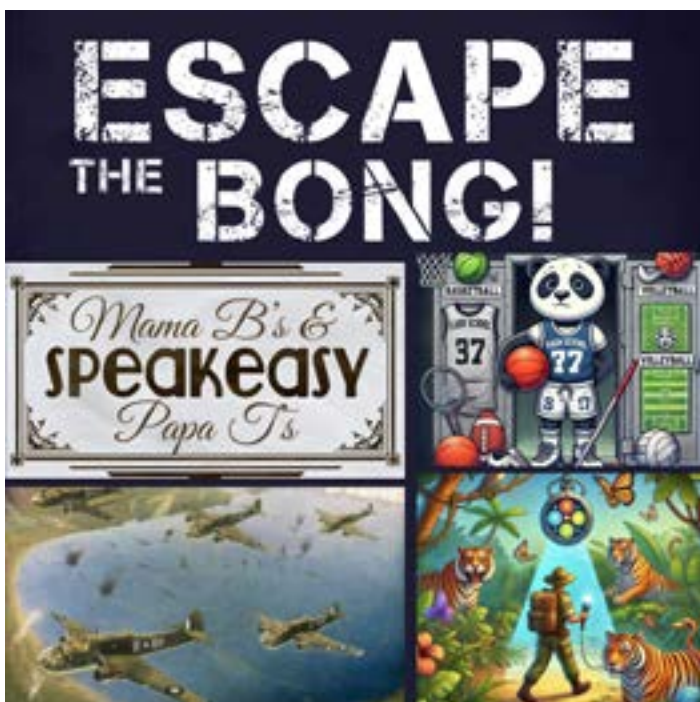
This year the 4 rooms are set to take place from February 13 through the 16th right here at the Bong Center!

There are four different choices this year. Two

are more adult in nature, Mama Bs & Papa Ts Speakeasy, Escape & Evade (created especially for the Bong Center!!) There are two rooms more suited for younger adults/family teams: Rescue the Missing Mascot and Jungle Escape!

Be sure to book your time now, you can have up to 8 people in the room!

Use the QR code (which will take you to the booking site for this event) or call Guest Services: 715-392-7151.



### 4 Escape Rooms:

- Escape & Evade • Rescue the Missing Mascot
- Mama B's & Papa T's Speakeasy • Jungle Escape

which will  
you solve?



QR or call Guest Services: 715-392-7151



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN GIDLEY

Dear Friends of the Bong Center,

These months coming out Christmas heading into spring can have you feeling cold and gray and looking for some exciting challenges.

We look no further than the Bong Center! We are thrilled to invite you to our annual "Escape the Bong" Fundraising Event, February 13-16. This exciting event brings four unique and thrilling escape room challenges designed to test your wits, teamwork, and problem-solving skills to your winter.

"Escape the Bong" is one of our largest fundraising events, proceeds raised directly fund our educational programs. This is our seventh consecutive year of providing high quality entertainment over the Valentines week. So come join the fun!

### Featured Escape Room Challenges:

1. **Escape and Evade:** Immerse yourself in a WWII South Pacific plane crash scenario, crafted specifically for the Bong Center Museum. Can you navigate the perils and make your escape?
2. **Jungle Adventure:** Venture deep into the jungle where solving clues and interpreting relics and maps are your only way out. Will you find the path to freedom?
3. **Save the Mascot:** It's homecoming week, and your team's mascot has been kidnapped! Race against time to discover where your rivals are hiding it and rescue the mascot before the big game.
4. **Mama Bs and Papa Ts Speakeasy:** Step into the roaring 1920s and work to solve clues that will lead you to the secret escape hatch. Hurry before the heat arrives!

Perfect for friends, families, and corporate teams looking for a fun and challenging experience. 8 people fill a room, or buy your room out at 8 and have as few as you prefer. Enjoy an unforgettable adventure, and support the vital programs and exhibits of the Bong Center.

Reserve your spot today and be part of the excitement. Do you have what it takes to "Escape the Bong"?

Thank you for your continued support.  
Sincerely,

John Gidley, Executive Director  
Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center  
gidley@bongcenter.org

# CONTENTS

- 02 **February 10th Anniversary Party**  
Music, cake and coffee!
- February 13-16th Escape the Bong**  
4 Choices for FUN!!
- 03 **Note from our Executive Director**  
**Days of Note**
- 04 **Comments from the Curator**  
Briana Fiantdt
- Volunteer Training: February 17th**  
New and Existing Volunteers
- Spotlight on Junior Volunteers**  
Eli builds a display
- 05 **Jim Donohue**  
Complete story in our blog online
- 06 **American Legion Post 435**  
**Regional Essay Contests!**
- 07 **Ice Festival ReCap**
- 08 **Silver Bay Veterans Home**
- 09 **Speaker Series**  
**Members Matter**

## DAYS OF NOTE

- February 10:** 80th Anniversary Cake, Songs & Photos!
- February 13-16:** ESCAPE THE BONG fundraiser
- February 17:** New/existing Volunteer lunch & training
- February 20:** **SPEAKER SERIES** Red Arrow to Buna, Florian Waitl, Command Historian for WI Natl Guard
- March 13:** **SPEAKER SERIES**  
Justin Taylen: Identifying "Marge"
- April 10:** **SPEAKER SERIES**  
Nita Peterson, Nurse in Afghanistan
- April 24:** Bong Center Volunteer Recognition Event  
Details coming soon!

## COMMENTS FROM OUR CURRATOR

Briana Fiandt

This semester we have welcomed three UMD interns to work in collections. We will be sharing their projects with you throughout the semester.

First up is Aydan DeCoursey, a Junior majoring in Public History

and minoring in GIS.

He has spent the last month doing a deep dive into the Korea and Vietnam exhibits and creating a tour script to be used by volunteers for guided tours.

We will be hosting a training session for those interested in learning more on **Monday, February 17th at noon (see the article following this for details!).**

We hope you can join us!

## NEW & CURRENT VOLUNTEER TRAINING

We need new volunteers to join our dedicated team!

Whether you're a history enthusiast or just eager to contribute, we provide comprehensive support and training to ensure every volunteer can give engaging, knowledgeable tours of our exhibits.

We are thrilled to introduce a brand-new tour script and guide for our Korea and Vietnam exhibits. This valuable resource, developed under the guidance of our curator, Briana Fiandt, equips volunteers—whether seasoned or new—with the tools they need to confidently share these important stories with visitors.

To further enhance the tour experience, volunteers will also have access to an iPad featuring a slideshow and video, providing additional context for guests.



**Volunteer Training: Monday, February 17  
Lite Lunch at Noon in the Classroom**

**Tour Training to Follow in the Gallery**

Training open to both new and returning volunteers. Come enjoy lunch, meet our team, and learn how you can help bring history to life for our visitors.

## SPOTLIGHT ON JR VOLUNTEER: ELIJAH MINOR

Elijah put together his display about Leo Larson. It will go next to the patch panel exhibit in the Homeland section of the museum. Elijah came to Briana, our curator, a few months ago with the idea of putting together a display honoring Leo Larson, a Superior native, who was a clerk/typist in General Patton's 3rd Army. During Leo's time overseas, he spent a lot of time in meetings with Generals, like Patton

and Eisenhower, typing up the battle plans for the Battle of the Bulge and Bastogne.

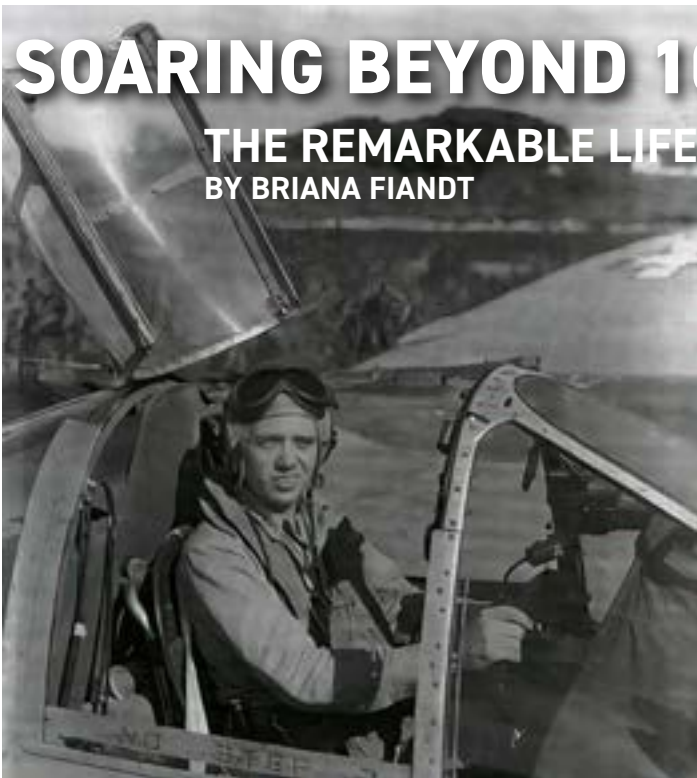
Elijah did all the research and writing to create this display. The choice of where to display this new exhibit was determined best to be located next to our patch panel exhibit. Both Leo's patch and signature are on our Harbor Tavern patch panel.



# SOARING BEYOND 100:

## THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF FIGHTER PILOT JIM DONOHUE

BY BRIANA FIANDT



### A Wisconsin Boyhood

Although you would never know it by looking at him, Jim Donohue turned 102 years old on Christmas Day 2024. He was born in Oxbo, Wisconsin in 1922. After graduating high school in 1941 he went to work in a logging camp in Michigan. It was while he was working there that he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor. Filled with patriotism and a sense of responsibility, he decided to enlist into the Army Air Corps because he wanted to be a pilot.

### A Pilot's Determination

Without a two year college degree, Jim was not eligible for pilot's training and went into a repair squadron. Then the Army dropped that requirement in lieu of passing a test. His high school education didn't teach him the advanced math

needed to pass the test the first time around, but Jim was determined to be a pilot. From his Alaska post, he studied and worked hard. Six months later, he took the test again and passed. He was able to leave the -73 degree weather at Ladd Field (outside Fairbanks) and head to sunny Santa Ana, California.

"The next eleven months were about the toughest I had ever gone through in my young life. I knew I would have to buckle down because I didn't want to wash out. Less than 50% of the cadets who started the program made it to graduation." said Jim about the training.

The hard work paid off and he made it through training. Assigned to Bellows Field in Hawaii with the 318th Fighter Group, 19th Fighter Squadron, he joined a fighter squadron flying the P-39 and learned fighter tactics and formation flying. <Continued online>

**Click here to read the complete story about Jim**

**If this is printed, go to our website blog!**

**<https://bongcenter.org/blog/soaring-beyond-100-the-remarkable-life-of-fighter-pilot-jim-donohue/>**



# AMERICAN LEGION POST 435

Meetings for both Legion and Auxiliary are second Tuesdays of every month at 7:00PM at Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center. **NEXT MEETING:** February 11th, 2024 7:00PM **New folks always welcome!**

## BONG CENTER REGIONAL ESSAY CONTEST MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOLS REGION WIDE INVITATION

This year the education department decided to find out what middle and high school students think will make up the museum of the future. The specifics regarding each of the two contests questions and submission processes are on the website, out in a press release and have been emailed to local educators. If your student hasn't heard, please submit

from home. We accept all qualifying essays entries.

Prizes for middle school will be \$100 to each top essay in each grade, along with non-cash prizes for runner up and third places in each grade.

The high school contest will award one grand prize to the winning essayist of \$250, \$75 for one first,

second and third prize. All of the winning essays will be featured on the Bong Center website.

If you have more questions, please reach out to Executive Director John Gidley; [gidley@bongcenter.org](mailto:gidley@bongcenter.org)

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS 5:00 PM Monday April 28th, 2025**



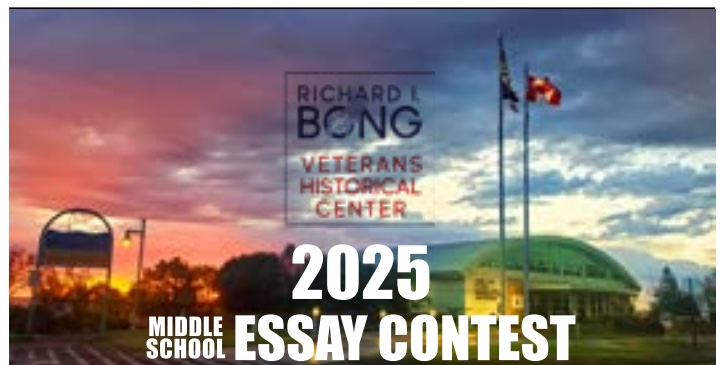
**\$250**  
Grand Prize

The top essay selected by Bong Center will earn \$250.00 grand prize!  
First, second and third places will each earn \$75.00

**\$75**  
First, Second & Third Prizes

All of the winning essays will be posted on the museum website.

**OPEN to ALL High School Students in the region: Minnesota, Wisconsin and U.P. of Michigan**



**\$100**  
Each Grade Grand Prize

The top essay in each grade will be selected by The Bong Center. Each individual grade will earn \$100.00 grand prize, runner-up and honorable mention (non-cash) prizes

All of the winning essays will be posted on the museum website. (This is a three page packet with all qualifying material, emails, addresses and dates).

**OPEN to ALL Middle School Students in the region: Minnesota, Wisconsin and U.P. of Michigan**

[www.BongCenter.org/](http://www.BongCenter.org/)



# ICE FESTIVAL 2025 RECAP • JANUARY 24-25<sup>TH</sup>



## DID YOU DEFEAT THE TOY COLLECTOR? Mini Escape Room & Ice Festival Racing Excitement!

Bong Center once again was the free trolley stop for the Lake Superior Ice Festival! Barkers Island had food trucks, Midwest Ice Racing Associations, and a craft show to list just a few things going on!

Inside the Bong we featured \$10 admission and an excellent view of the ice races (see course by the Meteor below) and a mini escape room! Created by the company who presents the upcoming "Escape the Bong", The preview room was an excellent way to try ahead of our main event February 13-16.

Designed to be solved quicker and let people unfamiliar with Escape Rooms get a preview of what is to come. Many folks took their entire half hour and defeated the evil toy collector and were able to recover their "stolen collectible toy!" Everyone was challenged and all expressed they had fun!



Our "backyard" looks good groomed for the racers!

## YOUR DONATIONS MATTER TO OUR SILVER BAY VETS

Thank you for your support of Silver Bay Veterans Home. They came to us this year to pick up the donations (usually we deliver to them.)

Randall Walz, Director of Public Relations, came to us to limit the veterans' exposure to illness.

Randall met with John Gidley, Executive Director, and our Randy Freeman, from American Legion Post 435. The donations were piled high, and Randy presented Randall with a check from the American Legion Post 435.

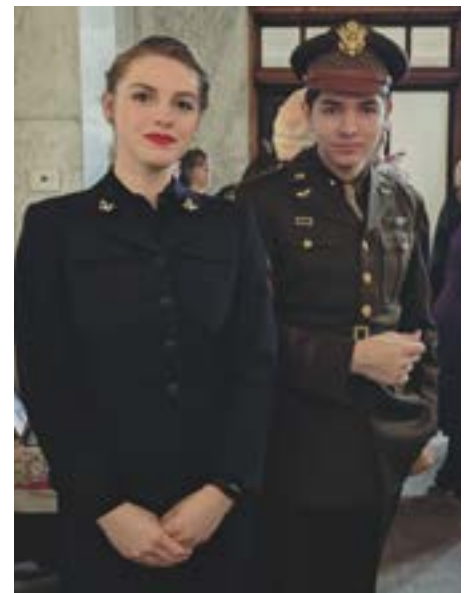
Thank you for your generous support of our veterans in need. The men and women living at the home really appreciate all the donations.

The donations stuffed their van tight and will make our Silver Bay veteran's winter much easier.



## BONG WEDDING INCLUDED AT TIME ARC THEATER EVENT

Our curator, Briana Fiandt, was invited to present our images from Dick and Marge's wedding at the Time Arc Theater January 19th. Junior Volunteers; Abby and Elijah dressed and helped to serve Anniversary cake. The event commemorated the end of WWII and the 80th anniversary of Dick and Marge. In addition to our images, Randy Lee played great music, and the Time Arc Theater players sang USO style songs. "It was a fantastic turn out." Briana said, " They ran out of chairs!"





## SPEAKER SERIES

Our Speaker Series are **ALWAYS**: on a Thursday, free, and begin at 6:30!

If you know of interesting speakers, please tell us!

Call Briana Fiandt  
715-392-7151, or email:  
fiandt@bongcenter.org

## SPRING 2025

### Florian Waitl

The Red Arrow Returns to Buna

**February 20 • 6:30 PM**

### Justin Taylen

Identifying "Marge"

**March 13 • 6:30 PM**

### Nita Peterson

Nurse in Afghanistan

**April 10 • 6:30 PM**

### Bryan Kastelic

Man vs Machine:  
Evolution of Infantry tactics  
and weapons to defeat armor

**May 8 • 6:30 PM**

## WHY BELONG?

Your membership support allows us to provide world-class exhibits, educational programming, and community outreach.



Become a member and help us honor history while enjoying great benefits! Your membership supports our mission to preserve and share the stories of those who served.

Becoming a member isn't just about free admission—it's about honoring heroes, preserving history, and inspiring future generations. Your support helps us tell the stories of those who served, ensuring their sacrifices and contributions are never forgotten.

With six membership levels, there's an option for everyone. Join at Staff Sergeant level or higher and gain access to thou-

sands of museums through the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association—unlocking free admission to cultural institutions across the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and beyond.

Plus, enjoy the convenience of a digital membership card, making access easier while supporting sustainability.

Your membership strengthens our mission to educate, remember, and connect communities through history. Join today and be part of something bigger! Visit our website or Guest Services to learn more.

Annual membership levels above \$100 automatically include NARM, North American Reciprocal Museum Association,

Member Benefits. NARM benefits include: over 1,000 museums, galleries, historical museums & societies, botanical gardens, children's museums, zoos & more!

See NARM website for details.

Your digital membership card will come to your email, we can assist with any issues. If you want an additional physical card, please see guest services.

[CLICK HERE](#) for NARM Details