

Walnut Village Resident Honored as Member of Montford Point Marines

The first opportunity for African-Americans to enlist and serve in the United States Marine Corps came in 1942 during World War II as the Corps began to recruit qualified African-American men. The men who enlisted completed recruit training at Montford Point, North Carolina, during a time and place where racism and segregation were a part of everyday life.



Walnut Village residents Louis and Shirley Massengale

Among those Marines was Walnut Village resident Louis Massengale, who, in 2012, was proudly awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for his service.

“It was an exciting and special day,” Louis remembers. “Four hundred thirty-eight of us made the trip to Washington DC to receive our medals from Speaker of the House John Boehner.”

“His entire family is very proud of him,” his wife Shirley says. Louis served in the Navy and Marines from 1944 to 1969, retiring as a gunnery sergeant.

The Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom are the highest civilian awards in the United States. The Gold Medal is awarded to persons “who have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient’s field long after the achievement.”

Between 1942 and 1949, approximately 20,000 African-American men completed recruit training and became known as the “Montford Point Marines.” Despite the challenges presented to those men, their valor and performance at Peleliu, Iwo Jima, the Chosen Reservoir, Vietnam, and more, paved the way for the integration of the armed forces.

Although a Marine, Louis did not like the regimen that often comes with home ownership like yard work, endless maintenance, cooking and cleaning. That’s why he and his wife chose to move to Walnut Village.

“We had many members from our church living at Walnut Village,” Shirley says. “We came to visit them many times and soon realized it was time for us to make the move. No more cooking or cleaning, just time to enjoy ourselves.”

“I may have the Gold Medal but my fellow residents and staff inspire me every day,” Louis says. “Walnut Village gets my highest honor.”