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The Free Lance-Star

Jewel honors all U.S. heroes

German jeweler creates one-of-a-kind medal to show his gratitude to America, for current actions as well as those from World War II



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By CATHY DYSON

Ludwig Stoeckl is a German jeweler who was upset when his country didn't support the United States in its war against Iraq.

His wife was in New York City two days before 9/11, and the terrorists' attacks left a lasting impression on them. So, when Germany didn't stand up with America, Stoeckl decided he would.

The 46-year-old created a one-of-a-kind medal, the Purple Heart Jewel to honor American forces of today, along with those who liberated his country from Nazis during World War II.

Stoeckl will present his gift on Sunday during a 12:45 p.m. ceremony at Hurkamp Park in Fredericksburg.

"Even if I'm nothing more than a common citizen, I thought it would be the best way to show friendship and thankfulness," he wrote in an e-mail.

Stoeckl doesn't want to focus on the jewel's value, but he guesses it's worth about \$20,000. It's modeled after the Purple Heart medal, given to those wounded or killed in action. His version is 18-karat gold with 29 diamonds around the profile of George Washington, who established the medal.

Stoeckl will present the award to the 42nd Division Rainbow Veterans Memorial Foundation, which will give it to the Virginia Holocaust Museum. Soldiers in the 42nd Infantry Division liberated the Dachau concentration camp in April 1945.

Stoeckl lives in Dachau, where he's surrounded by reminders of Hitler's horrors. He's profoundly grateful to American troops.

"They made it possible that I live," wrote Stoeckl, whose father was persecuted because he didn't support Hitler. "If Nazis would have been



This version is modeled after the Purple Heart.

allowed to succeed, I simply would not exist."

Sunday's ceremony will include representatives from several local historical and veterans groups.

It has been arranged by James Clemons, the Rainbow group's memorials officer. He thought Fredericksburg would be the best site for a ceremony because of its association with George Washington. Stoeckl agreed, saying the city has "a big share of the history of the United States."

"I'd be proud if this event in Fredericksburg would be recognized as one more historical moment," he wrote.



Stoeckl

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