



**The Merrillville/Ross Township Historical Society**  
13 West 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Merrillville, Indiana 46410  
*Merrillvillehistory.org*      219/756-2042

August 26, 2011

Dear Lee President's Award Contest Judges,

It is with great pleasure that I add my support for Marc Chase, Investigative Editor & *The Times* for the 2011 Lee President's Awards. Their outstanding leadership and support of the project to honor our area Civil War soldiers and veterans has generated interest and pride in the contributions of often forgotten soldiers.

As president of the Merrillville Historical Society and author of the book, "*Soldiers & Veterans Memorialized in the Merrillville Cemetery*", I often am asked to assist with information on soldiers of all eras. With the American Civil War's sesquicentennial beginning in April of this year it was not unusual to receive a call from a journalist researching a story on the local impact of that war.

However, it was quite extraordinary that Marc Chase was not only interested in the information about local soldiers of that bygone era but also was interested in the methodology and resources to learn available to learn more in depth about the individuals and how the conflict impacted their lives—if or when they returned home.

Shortly after the April 10<sup>th</sup> article entitled "Region Faces of the Civil War" was featured in *The Times*, many of us who were interviewed by Marc received inquiries about the men featured in the article as well as concern about the general condition of Civil War veterans' gravesites and headstones. Sensing this groundswell for action, Marc and *The Times* brought a group together at *The Times* office in Crown Point to take action to address the condition of many of the Civil War veterans' gravestones.

Marc researched the details of Veterans Administration headstone replacement program, recommended replacement "candidates" at each participating cemetery, completed the necessary forms and obtained required signatures. As a direct result of this project, the Veterans' Administration has approved applications for 30 replacement headstones for Union soldiers.

In addition to replacement headstones, Marc convinced *The Times* to coordinate donations for the purchase of Grand Army of the Republic flag medallions. Because of his efforts which include coordinating special memorial events and writing an on going series of articles, public contributions to purchase and install 120 commemorative G.A.R. medallion flag holders and flags.

As a result of this project, there has been a renewed interest in the Civil War era, the local involvement and personal stories of those who fought and died or fought and returned home. At the Merrillville Historical Society, we have featured several programs and exhibits about several of the soldiers and regiments noted in the article. Visitors frequently credit their interest to the series of articles and preservation efforts supported by *The Times*.

Those of us involved in the preservation and restoration efforts celebrate the announcement of each replacement headstone as if it were for a member of our immediate family! Without the efforts of Marc Chase and the support of *The Times* it would not have happened!

If additional information in support of their nomination for *Lee President's Award* is needed, I would be pleased to provide it.

Sincerely,



Alice Smedstad  
Co-President  
The Merrillville/Ross Township Historical Society