



# Saint Louis County

**Administration** • 100 North Fifth Avenue West, Room 202 • Duluth, MN 55802  
Phone: (218) 726-2450 • Fax: (218) 726-2469 • [www.stlouiscountymn.gov](http://www.stlouiscountymn.gov)

**Kevin Z. Gray**  
County Administrator

## NEWS RELEASE

**For immediate release:**

January 22, 2013

**CONTACT:** Dana Kazel, Communications Manager  
(218) 725-5049 office • (218) 591-2219 cell

### **Compelling story of World War II vet kicks off new County Board initiative**

Robert Givens was 18 years old when he enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps in 1942, and was just 20 when, while on his sixth mission aboard a B-17 bomber bound for Germany, the plane on which he served as a gunner fell apart over the North Sea. Originally from Leonidas and now living in Virginia, Givens remembers feeling the plane roll and break apart as he became pinned in the top turret. Before blacking out, he recalls seeing the co-pilot eject from the plane. His next memory is of falling 13,000 feet. Due to the tight confines of the turret, Givens had been unable to wear a parachute, but rather was attached to it only by a tether. As he plunged through the air, he had to pull the parachute to him in order to open it, which he managed to do before hitting the water. He broke his back but, remarkably, survived the explosion, fall and 40 minutes in the chilly water.

Of the ten-person crew, only four survived. Givens was the last of the four to be rescued. He spent the next eight months in a body cast before returning to duty. Givens went on to serve in the ground forces in World War II, and also served in Korea.

St. Louis County Commissioners heard Givens' story during today's County Board meeting, which was held at the Industrial Town Hall. His appearance kicked off an initiative announced by newly elected Board Chair Chris Dahlberg to highlight St. Louis County's history through its people and places. At each meeting throughout the year, a different commissioner is invited to highlight a person, group or place in his district. The information they gather will be shared with the St. Louis County Historical Society. Givens was invited to speak by Commissioner Keith Nelson.

"In our communities, we have these heroes," said Nelson. "It's wonderful that we have this opportunity to bring these individuals forward to be recognized."

Coincidentally, Givens celebrated his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday Monday, so commissioners surprised him with a birthday cake during the meeting.

“It’s terrific,” Givens said of the recognition. “I wish all my buddies who fought and died could be here, too.”

The St. Louis County Board consists of seven commissioners, representing the 200,000 citizens who live within the County’s 7,000-square-mile boundaries. For more information about the County, commissioners or their meeting schedule, visit [stlouiscountymn.gov](http://stlouiscountymn.gov) or call (218) 726-2450.

###