

# HEROIC ★★★ JOURNEY



by Kelly Rohder

**Military Veteran Receives Medals  
64 Years Later in Special Ceremony**

Though his courageous military career concluded decades ago, one local veteran's well-deserved recognition for his service did not come until years later.

In a special ceremony held at JJC on Sept. 9, World War II veteran Joe Belman of Lockport finally received the medals he earned 64 years ago but never was given.

ago through volunteer efforts within the community.

Valadez then contacted the office of U.S. Senator Dick Durbin for help, and



"Joe Belman has exemplified and defined that spirit that is uniquely American—the courage, energy, resolve and substance that have



Belman, an 85-year-old retired U.S. Army Air Force Staff Sergeant, never received certain medals he earned during 35 combat missions as a ball turret gunner for the 8th Air Force – 305th Bomb Group.

"What can I say?" Belman said after accepting his medals. "I'm at a loss for words. This is amazing. I'm certainly humbled because I know that there are so many million more out there that deserve an honor like this."

Belman, a Mexican-American who served from July 1944 to March 1945, said he didn't think much about those medals in the years following the war. It wasn't until a recent conversation in May with his friend, Sal Valadez, a multicultural outreach and retention specialist at JJC, that Belman began talking about the honors he had earned but never formally received.

"I said, 'We can fix that,' " Valadez said, who first met Belman over 20 years

through that connection, was able to secure Belman's medals.

Presenting medals to Belman were Kam Buckner, a representative from Sen. Dick Durbin's, office and Lt. Colonel Jerry Gleason of the Illinois Army National Guard.

As an audience of family members, local legislators and community members looked on, Gleason pinned Belman's medals to his suit lapel. They included the Good Conduct Medal, the European Theater Medal with three bronze stars, the World War II Victory Medal, an honorable service lapel button and a marksmanship badge.

In addition to the public ceremony, Belman's military experiences were recently recorded by the JJC Media Services Office as part of the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. The video will eventually be hosted on the college's Web site.

been the backbone of our nation and that continue to illuminate our path," Buckner said.

