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U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf (10th District) honors Joan Lemley, of Purcellville, on Aug. 6. Lemley will receive the Congressional Gold Medal for her service as a noncombat pilot during World War II. Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Lisa Johnson

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## Purcellville woman receives highest U.S. civilian honor

Source: Loudoun Times-Mirror  
SATURDAY, AUGUST 15 2009

**It's been 65 years since Joan Lemley, who lives in Purcellville today, trained and qualified with the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP, of World War II.**

Lemley, 88, donned her WASP navy-blue trousers, white blouse and brass Aug. 6 and met Rep. Frank Wolf (R-10<sup>th</sup>) at Purcellville's Town Hall to receive the congressional act, signed July 1 by President Barack Obama, authorizing the award of the Congressional Gold Medal to the 300 surviving women pilots of that era.

The unit was formed in 1942 to put women behind the controls of military aircraft in noncombat jobs and free up the men to get back to the war. More than 25,000 women answered the call, 1,830 were accepted and took the oath, and 1,074 completed the training. Lemley and Barbara Ross, of Warrenton, were among them.

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What quality in a county administrator do you think is most important?

- Clear vision for the future
- Communicates well with staff, residents, supervisors
- Strong leader

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They will receive the medal at a ceremony at the Capitol later this year.

Lemley said she fell in love with flying at age 11 when her father, a World War I pilot, flew her over the Statue of Liberty. She was living in Culpeper and had her pilot's license when the call went out.

The program ended in 1944, and the women's success in flying fighter, bomber, transport and training aircraft led to the integration of female pilots into the U.S. armed services.

After the war, Lemley piloted surplus trainers to their new owners for 10 cents a mile and briefly tried her hand as a stewardess, but found it too much like waitressing. She spent 32 years with the FAA and moved to Purcellville to be near her son six years ago.

-- Shannon Sollinger

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