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Former Danbury resident honored by Congress for war heroics

By Eileen FitzGerald, Staff Writer

Published: 07:34 p.m., Friday, March 19, 2010

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Eleanor Feeley Lawry, 88, far left, formerly of Danbury, was among the Women Airforce Service Pilots honored on Capital Hill March 10. They were the first women to fly American military planes. (AP Photo/Lauren Victoria Burke) Photo: Contributed Photo / The News-Times Contributed

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Former Danbury resident Eleanor Feeley Lawry combined her love of flying and her love for her country to become one of 1,100 pioneer women pilots who served in World War II.

More than half a century later, the 88-year-old Lawry traveled from her home now in Pennsylvania to the United States capitol to receive the country's highest civilian honor for service, the Congressional Gold Medal.

"It's a beautiful medal," Lawry said after the March 10 ceremony she attended with her three children and other family members. "I had a great time in the WASPs. I never thought about getting recognition. We just got the call to service."

President Barack Obama signed a bill July 1 to award the medals to the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War

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II, including 11 who died in training and 38 killed during duty.

They were the first women ever to fly American military aircraft and flew noncombat assignments in the U.S. so male pilots could fly overseas in combat.

About 175 of the nearly 300 still living WASPs attended the ceremony where U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi told the overflowing audience that the pilots went unrecognized for too long.

One medal was given to the Smithsonian Institution and each of the women or their families received a medal to take home at the ceremony that

Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, and Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., along with Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., and Susan Davis, D-Calif., led the push in Congress to get the women recognized.



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