

MEN of GOODWILL

first Jewish organization to boycott German goods during World War II; in 1963, it became the only national veterans group to join in Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington; and in 1985, the JWV, in response to President Ronald Reagan's visit to the Bitburg Cemetery, where former Nazis are buried, rallied other veterans to hold a ceremony honoring soldiers who died fighting fascism.

But politics are always set aside for a regular JWV project: greeting the men, women and children about to become American citizens.

Each Monday morning, JWV Americanism Officer Bert Ellstein can be found standing in front of a large American flag inside the Federal Building downtown. He wears a blue-and-white hat with the JWV insignia, and a pin linking the flags of Israel and the United States. A loud fan hums in the background, and dozens of adults and children listen carefully as Mr. Ellstein discusses their upcoming citizenship. He passes out copies of the Bill of Rights.

Mr. Ellstein was especially moved by a naturalization ceremony last month, when he helped 84 adults and one child from 26 countries — many of them Arab nations — become American citizens.

Some of the men and women were dressed elegantly; others wore T-shirts and thongs. Mr. Ellstein walked with them to the courtroom of Judge Gerald Rosen, where the immigrants raised their right hands and pledged allegiance to the United States.

"You don't need any training to do what I do," says Mr. Ellstein, a Michigan native who served with the Navy in the South Pacific. "You just have to know how to be a little friendly."

After the swearing-in, the new citizens came to shake hands with the judge; others asked for his autograph. Mr. Ellstein watched with pride as families took photos and made videos.

"It does my heart good," he says. "I like to greet these people, welcome them, help them — no matter where they're from."

That's the same way JWV volunteers feel when they visit at the Allen Park Veterans Hospital.

The Jewish vets regularly hold numerous programs for veterans around the state. They have picnics, Christmas

and Chanukah parties. The women's auxiliaries visit the Oakland County Children's Village, the Ann Arbor Medical Center and the Northland Nursing Home, among other projects.

Leading the troops at the Allen Park hospital is JWV Commander Katz, who serves juice to the veterans who've gathered for bingo in a 9th-floor room. He and a handful of men and women, all wearing JWV caps, come every other

cessantly, dropping soft ashes into trays attached to the side of their chairs.

Mr. Katz and other men take turns spinning the bingo machine, which makes a heavy pattering sound like horses' hooves on a stone road. The volunteers move slowly around the room, helping disabled men move the numbers on their bingo cards. They give a gentle pat on the back to winners.

"These vets in the hospital, a lot of these guys never get any visitors," Mr. Katz says. "We bring them small gifts, and they are ever so happy to see us."

The gifts are usually quarters, given to bingo winners and everyone who comes to play the game.

"That's where your money goes," Mr. Schwartz says. "That's your dimes and quarters for the poppies."

From the time he was a little boy Michael Bennett wanted wings of silver. He loved planes, soaring through the sky, engines and motors and racing into the clouds.

When he was 26, he found those wings on a ship stationed outside Vietnam.

Born in Detroit, Mr. Bennett, one of the younger JWV members, holds a master's degree from Harvard University. He wanted to attend medical school; "unfortunately, the draft board had other plans." He joined the Marine Corps.

Mr. Bennett, now 44, entered officer candidate school in 1967. He calls it

"12 weeks of hell." He ran obstacle courses and marched through the thick, red clay of the Virginia hills. In the afternoon, when the sun was so hot you could hardly breathe and the humidity was at its thickest, Mr. Bennett and the other men sat for instruction in small huts. Every 10 minutes or so, one could hear a loud crack as instructors tapped sleeping soldiers on their "chrome domes," or helmets.

Mr. Bennett was one of 2,300 men to enter officer candidate school and one of 700 who finished.

Upon completing the program, Mr. Bennett was accepted for naval aviator training in Pensacola, Fla., where he graduated at the top of his class. He taught primary jet training to young pilots for one year in Florida and trained on the F-4 Phantom in California before being assigned, in June 1969, to a flight squadron



month to host the game.

Lillian Stein, president of the Lt. Roy Green Auxiliary #529, wouldn't miss this evening for anything.

"It's a duty to come here," she says. "These are war heroes; the war never stopped for these men. If I can give them a little peace of mind, I'm only too happy to do it."

"We owe these men something," she says. "There are some things you just have to do."

Many of the vets are in wheelchairs. They're older men, some of whom bear the most terrible reminders of the war: stumps of legs blown off by land mines, and wounds that never heal. They smoke in-

Ely Katz, Jack Schwartz, Bernard Gross: "We worried about our children. That's why we fought."