

Man goes from war hero to noted organic gardener

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APRYL PILOLLI/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Marvin Duren is the owner of Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon, the region's only USDA certified organic nursery and garden center. Staff photo by Apryl Pilolli

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By Emiko Moore, Contributing Writer

10:16 AM Monday, April 12, 2010

Marvin Duren started Marvin's Organic Gardens in Lebanon in 1999 and created a full-service nursery and landscape design company. Today, it is the region's only USDA certified Organic nursery and garden center.

In the early 1970s, Duren served as a U.S. Army Ranger in Vietnam and received a purple heart and two bronze stars. On what was to be his last mission, his 25th, Duren experienced what could only be described as a scene straight out of a movie. He led a reconnaissance team of six men into the A Shau Valley, in an area nine kilometers from the infamous Hill 937, aka "Hamburger Hill." Duren said, "It was a bad place on a good day."

About 20 yards from his helicopter, the enemy opened fire and he was shot two times, with bullets wounding his hip and pelvis. As he crawled to a hole for safety, he was shot three more times, with bullets piercing his spleen, appendix, and lungs.

A medic crawled into his hole, and for more than three hours, performed life-sustaining measures while the four other members of his team held off the enemy until a MEDEVAC helicopter could retrieve Duren. As two men carried him to the helicopter, Duren again was pelted with two more bullets that missed his heart by inches. At 20, Duren had been shot seven times.

Three men on his team were rescued two days later. One was killed, and the other is still missing. Duren has not given up hope and still wears an engraved silver MIA-bracelet with the name, James Champion, and the date April 24, 1971, the day he went missing.

For Duren, plants have been mentally and physically healing. After witnessing first hand the devastation of the chemical weapon Agent Orange in Vietnam, Duren knew he would never use chemicals when gardening.

After returning from Vietnam, Duren partnered with his father and built 24 Waffle houses in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky area. He ran the business for 28 years, planting organic gardens around the restaurants, and in the last three years had the top sales for the franchise in the country.

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