



# OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

MICHAEL W. FRERICHS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
July 1, 2024

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## Illinois Treasurer Michael Frerichs Returns Purple Heart Medal to Family of Pearl Harbor Veteran

*11<sup>th</sup> medal returned under Frerichs' Operation Purple Heart*

Video of news conference will be available here:

<https://cms.illinois.gov/agency/media/video/videos.html>

Additional b-roll available here: <https://bit.ly/PurpleHeartJeromeEven>

CHICAGO - Ahead of the Independence Day holiday, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs today returned a missing Purple Heart medal to the family of a late Army Air Corps veteran from Park Ridge.

The medal, given to those wounded or killed in military combat, belonged to Jerome Even, who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and rose to the rank of Master Sergeant. Mr. Even put the medal in a bank safe deposit box. He died in April 2014 at age 92, and the contents of the safe deposit box ended up at the State Treasurer's Office, which works to reunite people with unclaimed property.

"Jerome Even was a true hero, part of the Greatest Generation, who bravely served his country at such a crucial time in our nation's history," Treasurer Frerichs said. "We honor his sacrifice. I am grateful we returned his Purple Heart to his family, where it belongs."

The medal was returned as a result of Operation Purple Heart, an unprecedented mission to return Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners. In May, Treasurer Frerichs unveiled a [web page](#) listing Purple Heart medals the Treasurer's Office is seeking to return.

Jim Even, one of Jerome Even's sons, said about a dozen people who had seen coverage of Treasurer Frerichs' news conference reached out to him asking if the medal might belong to his family.

"I said, 'Oh my goodness.' I didn't know he had anything left in that safe deposit box. It was a shock. We were very surprised and happy," said Jim Even, who then contacted the State Treasurer's [Unclaimed Property](#) team. "The people there are just wonderful and just walked me through everything with the forms. I couldn't wait to share this whole story with my siblings when we all get together."

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Master Sergeant Even was awarded the Purple Heart by Headquarters, 7<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group on Feb. 3, 1942, according to military paperwork in the safe deposit box. Jim Even said his father told him the Purple Heart was earned during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.

“My recollection is that he was doing guard duty overnight. He and his fellow soldiers saw planes flying over the island going toward the harbor that had rising suns on the tail, which was the Japanese Zeros insignia,” Jim Even said his father told him.

“Bombs started falling and he realized, ‘Oh my gosh, this is for real.’ He went into the barracks where he was guarding the officers. He said, ‘Air raid,’ and they didn’t hear it because it was from far away and the sound hadn’t traveled. They didn’t believe him and started throwing shoes at him. And then a bomb hit close, and everyone ran for shelter. And that’s how he was wounded in the back of his leg during the bombing,” Even said his father told him.

Jim Even said he found letters from his grandmother to his father from Dec. 8 and Dec. 12 asking if her son was alive. His father didn’t get the letters until a week later, and he was able to telegraph that he was OK.

Master Sergeant Even also earned numerous other awards during World War II, including an Air Medal, Good Conduct Ribbon, and the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Ribbon with four battle stars.

Treasurer Frerichs has now returned 11 Purple Heart medals to their rightful owners, the most by any administration in Illinois, but there is still more work to be done.

“Our ask is simple. If you recognize a name, then reach out to them or their family because maybe we have their Purple Heart,” Frerichs said. “You also can reach my office through [operationpurpleheart.org](http://operationpurpleheart.org).”

A full list of unclaimed Purple Hearts is available [online](#).

Military medals are among the most difficult items to return because neither the Armed Forces nor the federal government maintains a comprehensive list of awardees.

A thorough vetting of inquiries will occur once an electronic claim is made at [icash.illinoistreasurer.gov](http://icash.illinoistreasurer.gov).

### **About Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs**

The Illinois State Treasurer’s Office is a powerful economic engine that invests in people to drive prosperity, development and growth throughout the state. As State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR’iks) is the state’s Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$60 billion. The investments help families pay for college and trade school; workers save for a dignified retirement; and local governments process bill payments more efficiently so they can pass along the savings to taxpayers. The office provides financial institutions money to loan to farmers, small business owners, and qualified individuals at below-market rates because better jobs create stronger communities. The office operates the state’s largest consumer-protection initiative, the missing money I-Cash program, which has returned a record-breaking \$2 billion since Frerichs was elected.

For more news about the State Treasurer’s Office, please follow Treasurer Frerichs on Instagram at [ILTreasurer](#), [LinkedIn](#) and Facebook at [Invested in You – Treasurer Michael Frerichs](#).

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