

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



MEDIA INQUIRIES

Mary Anne Demo
Packard Proving Grounds
Phone: 586-739-4800
Email: maryanne@packardprovinggrounds.org

Packard Proving Grounds Honors 2025 Tolonen Award Recipient, Joe Simmer

Shelby Township, MI — December 2, 2025 — The Packard Motor Car Foundation was proud to gather volunteers and community members at its Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on Sunday, November 9, 2025. The annual event celebrates the people who give their time, knowledge, and passion to the Packard Proving Grounds Historic Site. Each year, the event includes the presentation of the Tolonen Award, established in 2014 and named for Dave and Sue Tolonen, whose commitment and stewardship helped preserve the site for future generations.

The 2025 recipient, Joe Simmer, was recognized for his dedication and meaningful contributions to preserving the history and operations of the Packard Proving Grounds. Joe first came across the site in 2023 during a visit to the Shelby Farmers Market. Drawn in by a volunteer sign, he applied on the spot. His first shift, assisting with tours, revealed a depth of history he hadn't expected.

"I realized this isn't just automotive. It's family history, military history, architectural history," Joe said. "It's got a lot of facets." That realization paved the way for the work he would become known for: uncovering and cataloguing significant World War II military testing documents, creating a working list for more than 70 previously unorganized reports, and identifying material that even longtime volunteers had never seen.

Joe has also supported ongoing improvements to the Proving Grounds' IT infrastructure, helping strengthen the systems that allow volunteers and staff to do their work more efficiently. As he shared, "There are a lot of people there from different walks of life, and we're all trying to achieve a common goal: to make the place the best it can be."

When his name was announced as the Tolonen Award recipient, Joe described the moment simply: “I was honored... It was very humbling. I go there and I try to do the best I can.”

Executive Director Mary Anne Demo emphasized the importance of volunteers like Joe in sustaining the historic site. “The Packard Proving Grounds exists today because of people who choose to give their time, their energy, and their hearts,” Demo said. “Our volunteers are the reason this site continues to grow, educate, and inspire. Joe represents the very best of who we are—curious, dedicated, and deeply committed to preserving this remarkable place.”

The evening also included a moment of remembrance for longtime volunteer Ray Hollingsworth, whose kindness and steady presence left a meaningful impact on the Packard community.

The Packard Proving Grounds continues to thrive because of volunteers whose work spans tours, restoration, research, archival preservation, landscaping, event support, and countless behind-the-scenes efforts. Their contributions ensure that the Proving Grounds remains a place of learning, legacy, and community connection.

For more information on volunteering or supporting the Packard Proving Grounds, visit PackardProvingGrounds.org/Volunteer.

About the Packard Motor Car Foundation/Packard Proving Grounds

The Packard Motor Car Foundation (a 501c3 charitable organization) owns the Packard Proving Grounds Historic site which is recognized as a State of Michigan historic site, and on the National Register of Historic Places. Its mission is to preserve the legacy of the Packard Motor Car Company through the restoration and preservation of the Packard Proving Grounds, educating future generations about America’s automotive history.

Visit PackardProvingGrounds.org for more information.