Rick Mantei Hosts 101st Birthday Celebration for World War II Veteran Bruce Cook

Rick and Lisa Mantei hosted a 101st birthday celebration honoring WWII veteran Bruce Cook, recognizing his service, legacy, and remarkable life.



CINCINNATI, OH, UNITED STATES, September 25, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Rick Mantei recently hosted a special birthday celebration on Wednesday, September 23rd, honoring World War II veteran Bruce Cook as he marked his 101st birthday surrounded by friends and well-wishers in Lexington, SC.

The celebration recognized both an extraordinary milestone and a lifetime of service. Cook, a retired Staff Sergeant and World War II ball-turret gunner, completed 35 combat missions over France during the war.

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>
> *Rick Mantei*

Earlier this year, Cook received one of France’s highest honors when he was named a Knight of the French Legion of Honor in recognition of his service during World War II.

To help make his 101st birthday memorable, Rick and his wife, Lisa Mantei, surprised Bruce with cake, balloons, handwritten birthday cards and original newspapers dating back to 1925, the year he was born. The historic newspapers provided a unique look back at the world Bruce entered more than a century ago.

ABC Columbia also attended the celebration and covered Bruce’s milestone birthday, helping share his remarkable story with the broader community.

Rick first met Bruce at a WWII veterans event, and the two have remained close friends since.

“I’m just inspired by his whole life, by the way he’s raised his family, by his actions during the war,” Rick said. “You won’t find a finer fellow than him. He epitomizes the Greatest Generation.”

For Bruce, the celebration was another reminder of the people who continue to appreciate his service and the life he has lived.

“I’ve seen so many things change, and I have really enjoyed life,” Bruce said. “I have always thought of myself as kind of a happy person, and it’s great to enjoy life as much as I do. I never thought I’d make it this old, but it’s just great.”

For Rick and Lisa, hosting the celebration was an opportunity to honor a friend, a veteran and a member of a generation whose service and sacrifice continue to inspire people more than eight decades after World War II.

About Bruce Cook

Bruce Cook is a World War II veteran who served as a Staff Sergeant and ball-turret gunner, completing 35 combat missions over France. In 2026, he was recognized by the French government and named a Knight of the French Legion of Honor for his service during World War II.

About Rick Mantei

Rick Mantei is a combat veteran, pilot and longtime supporter of veterans and community-focused causes. Through his philanthropic efforts, Rick has worked to honor veterans, support families in need and create meaningful experiences for people throughout the community. Learn more about Rick Mantei at https://rickmantei.com/.

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