

PRESS RELEASE

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COMMUNITY VETERANS MEMORIAL TO OPEN JUNE 1

Construction crews, artists, architects and project coordinators are putting the finishing touches on the Community Veterans Memorial this month in southwest Munster, Indiana, in preparation for the dedication of the park on June 1.

The dedication ceremony will begin at 1:30 p.m., with tours to follow until 4 p.m. The keynote speakers will include special guests Brigadier General Steve Ritchie, USAF (Ret) and Admiral Ann E. Rondeau, Commander of the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. The US Navy Band from Great Lakes along with the Orak Shrine Pipes and Drums will entertain with patriotic music.

“This dedication ceremony marks the culmination of nearly three years of planning and development to create a memorial park like no other in existence,” said Edward P. Robinson, co-chairman with Donald S. Powers of the Community Veterans Memorial Committee. “Our utmost appreciation and thanks goes to the artists, committee members and local veterans who poured their hearts into the project and helped make it a reality.”

The Community Veterans Memorial idea was born in late 1999 when a group of local veterans came together to talk about creating a place that honors our nation’s war heroes. The idea soon grew to include three main goals: to remember, to educate and to challenge.

These goals were carried through in the works of Highland Park, Ill., artists Omri and Julie Rotblatt-Amrany. With initial support of donated land and seed monies from Community Hospital to get the project started, the couple and their team from the Studio of Rotblatt-Amrany began their task of turning 9 acres of vacant land into a massive war memorial.

In developing the park, they strove to remember those who participated in the great wars of the 20th century - World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm - those killed and those who survived, their stories, and their history. They planned to educate those who live today about the realities of war - not the heroics - the suffering of war and its repeating history. Finally, they sought to challenge those who shape the future, to break the repetition of violence, to imagine and hope for peace.

A separate memorial for each conflict of the 20th century is contained in the \$3.2 million park. The memorials, created from bronze, granite and actual war memorabilia, are set amidst landscapes that depict the terrains of the countries in which the conflicts took place. More than 1,000 bricks have been placed in a memorial brick pathway that winds to each memorial, and trees, benches and flagpoles bear the names of additional sponsors who wish to honor veterans. In addition, about 600 educational bricks mark the history trail, detailing facts and statistics about our nation's military and war history.

Architect Fred Kaplan of Architects Limited stressed that the overall design of the park is steeped in symbolism. The World War II monument, for example, is located on the highest point of the park, symbolizing the global enormity of this war, yet also directing visitors' eyes to a field of wildflowers in a far-off pasture to symbolize the hope for a peaceful future.

The Rotblatt-Amrany team focused on bringing as much detail as possible into the sculptures they created for the memorials. To do this, they commissioned writer/researcher Kathleen Van Ella of Portraits Chicago, Inc., to create a detailed account of each artistic impression. Julie and Omri Rotblatt-Amrany also conducted their own interviews with local veterans who shared intimate personal wartime experiences. As a result, the life-sized bronzed figures include the most minute details, such as dog tag numbers and realistic, unshaven faces.

To create an even greater sense of realism, the artists incorporated actual war-time artifacts into the park, including a donated Huey helicopter that rests near the Vietnam memorial as a monument to the workhorse of rescued troops. In the World War II memorial, a replica of a P-51 Mustang fighter plane protrudes from the Pacific Theatre. Other smaller artifacts, including boots, guns and actual letters written from the home front, are incorporated into the sculptures.

Landscape Designer Cinda Jo Berry of CJB Associates directed the efforts to create a sense of cohesiveness yet complexity to the park.

The focus of WWI is enhanced by plants that are typical of turn-of-the-century Midwest, such as lilacs, rose bushes and lilies.

Approaching WWII, a terraced plantation depicts the formal gardens of France, with cotton astar, rose bushes and tall formal yew trees. A large dome represents Pacific and Atlantic battlefields, the Pacific side sowed with oats and poppy seeds, and the European side marked with lavender. Near the crashed plane, bushes that burn bright red with autumn color simulate fire.

Korea, depicted by craggy boulders, is strewn with azaleas and pine trees that will grow large to symbolize the forgotten war. Vietnam shows natural terracing of rice paddies with rhododendron, weeping willow and bamboo to depict swamp land. Cherry trees and bamboo grasses grow in the lagoon, which contains three fountains that pump a stream surrounding the park.

The bridge leading to Desert Storm is strewn with pea gravel to depict sand, and the entire memorial ends with an open prairie field of natural grasses and Midwest wildflowers to represent a brighter future of peace for all generations to come.

Fundraising efforts to maintain the park and add to the memorial brick pathway will continue, with information available at www.communityveteransmemorial.org, or by calling 219-836-4582.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CREATION OF THE MEMORIAL

Timeless Creations - Julie Rotblatt-Amrany and Omri Amrany, Artists
CJB & Associates, Inc. - Cinda Jo Berry, Designer
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Beatty Machining and Manufacturing Company
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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Washington D.C.
Women In Military Service for America Memorial- Arlington National Cemetery
National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum - Chicago, Illinois
Indiana Historical Society - Indianapolis, Indiana
THE TIMES Library - Munster, Indiana
Kathryn Hodek Lininger - Munster, Indiana, Personal medal
Lucien Stryk, The Pit and Other Poems
Steel Shavings Home Front: The World War II Years, James B. Lane, Ed., Indiana
University Northwest
Calumet Regional Archives, Indiana University Northwest - Gary, Indiana

Tom Clark, History Department, Lake Central High School - St. John Indiana (wartime letters)

Don Johnson - Munster, Indiana (wartime letters)

Diana Hackbarth, U. S. Navy Ret'd, Professor of Nursing, Loyola University, Chicago

Diane Carlson Evans, R.N., Vietnam Women's Memorial, Washington D. C.

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U.S. Army Photographs - Department of the Army, Washington D.C.

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Indiana State Library, Indianapolis - Picture and Manuscript Reference

Woodrow Wilson House - Washington D.C.

VFW Magazine National Archives - Kansas City, Missouri

Purdue University Calumet - Library Archives, Rose Anderson

Corbis Corporation - Bellevue, Washington - "The Vietnam Experience-A Contagion of War"

Magnum Photos - New York, New York - "Robert Capa: Images of War"

John Latko, U. S. Navy - Munster, Indiana. Personal collection as seen originally in Life Magazine.

National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum - Chicago, Illinois -

Laszlo Candor, photographer - John Hosier, photographer