

All Veterans Memorial: The People's Memorial in Mount Olive

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Patriotism is much more than brass bands, flags, or parades. More than pageantry for many, patriotism is a personal feeling. Featuring an appreciation and reverence, patriotism encompasses a quiet surge of pride and gratitude for the people who battled for America's freedom-- knowing that democracy and liberty are hard-won. It is a feeling that encourages caring, empathy and giving back.

Founded in 2005, Mount Olive's Turkey Brook Park's All Veterans Memorial Park (AVM) fervently celebrates that type of patriotism. With Veteran's Day approaching, there's never been a better time to visit this inspiring site.

The All Veterans Memorial Park is sponsored by the Hackettstown-based Publius Organization. During the Global War on Terror, this non-profit organization was originally designed to provide goodwill opportunities to various organizations and individuals who wanted to develop their own troop-support campaign.

More than just a series of monuments, the All Veterans Memorial was created to honor the brave men and women who are and have been in the United States Armed Forces. Created with the empowering idea of fostering a sense of unity between civilians and the military, the AVM goes even further. Providing education, outreach programs, and events, the AVM's mission is to promote public awareness, involvement and support for all U.S. Service Members.

Located at 30 Flanders Road in Budd Lake, next to the historic Seward Mansion at the entrance of Turkey Brook Park, the All Veterans Memorial is open to the public and is completely free. Visitors of all ages are welcome.



Expansive and pristine, a place of utter beauty and contentment, it is often said that a sense of peace comes over visitors the moment they enter. Affectionately nicknamed “The People’s Memorial,” the site was built exclusively by volunteers. Sprawling 1.3 acres, it celebrates the taste of freedom and what it takes to get there.

“Many people believe that the township built the memorial,” Developer, Charlie Uhrmann tells. “However, after they learned that ordinary people--with pure love for their country--created every facet of the park, they are always shocked.”

100% funded by private donations and volunteers, “the All Veterans Memorial has kept its promise to never accept taxpayer funding,” Uhrmann prides. “No one within our organization has ever received any compensation.”

Born and raised in Wisconsin, and first residing in Florida, Uhrmann is passionate about a variety of philanthropic causes. After moving to New Jersey, and when the casualties from the Global War on Terror increased, she turned her efforts in that direction. “I think that 9/11 fundamentally changed people on the most basic level,” she remarks candidly. “I wanted to do something to pay it forward.”

Although Uhrmann is very much the idea-person behind the park, she is eager to point out that the All Veterans Memorial is very much a team passion. She describes that the brainstorm for it was one of those rare and amazing coincidences where all elements just came together. It was a time when her son was in the final stages of his Eagle Scout community project--building a memorial of his own-- and when fellow friends and volunteers, Bill and Linda Sohl and Thea Dunkle were relocating the Mount Olive War Monument.

“I saw the location allotted in Turkey Brook Park, and immediately all of these ideas began swimming in my head,” Uhrmann relates. “I wanted an all-inclusive place that would honor absolutely everyone, and give people a place where they could peacefully reflect. I wanted the memorial to show the aspects of America’s rich history, what America as a young country has gone through...for people to learn the facts behind wars, our three branches of government, our presidents, and the price of freedom.”

To help with this awesome project she recruited five of New Jersey’s most admired landscapers and an architect. In particular, Uhrmann mentions Karl Meier of Meier Stone in Flanders. “He was extremely instrumental in providing engineering and much of the materials and labor. His fingerprints are all over the park. Without Karl, we would not have nearly what we have today. He truly is one of the most talented craftsmen of all time,” she enthuses. With an artistic eye and creative plan, Uhrmann relates that she intentionally sought to have every element of the park interconnecting and flowing into each other. This not only stresses symmetry and design, but it also shows off the almost magical element to the memorial. The memorial’s very shape was inspired by the Congressional Medal of Honor. “If you are flying overhead in a helicopter, you can see the shape. It’s amazing,” Uhrmann enthuses.

The park holds several memorials with the All Veteran's Memorial Ceremonial Ground being the main complex. In the center is Mt. Olive's original war monument, The STAR or Pentagon Platform, The Presidents Preamble Stage, Bill of Rights Wall, the Charlie Johnson Memorial Gazebo, The North Star Seating Area, the Spiritual Cenotaph, the Warrior Obelisk Monument, the POW/Remembrance Wall, and the War Dog Memorial.

Mt. Olive's Original War Monument was donated by World War II Veteran, John Planker. Honoring Mount Olive's local fallen heroes, the inscription reads, "Erected in Grateful Tribute to the Men and Women of Mount Olive Township Who Faithfully Served in the Armed Forces of Our Country." Originally it had been located at Budd Lake and dedicated in 1968. The monument found a proper home at the All Veteran's Memorial in 2000.

The STAR or Pentagon Platform is designed to resemble the U.S. Pentagon. It designates the five branches of service that are equally divided: Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines. Pavers note the honorary military service of all who have served. The platform then flows into the Global War on Terror Memorial Bridge which honors New Jersey's fallen.

The bridge then connects the VALOR Bar, or Presidential Preamble Stage, paying tribute to all United States Presidents and their civil service. The Bill of Rights Wall displays templates of the first ten Bill of Rights Amendments that were ratified by Congress.

The Charlie Johnson Memorial Gazebo was built to honor the memory of Mt. Olive resident and former Mayor, Charles H "Charlie" Johnson. Serving as a Sergeant in the Air Force 9th Division in World War II, Johnson was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Force Medal for his service to his country.

The NorthStar Seating Area was built by the Home Depot and Karl Meier. Dedicated to New Jersey Gold Star Mothers and those who lost a loved one during war, the comfortable area is designed to give a sense of peace.

Designed and funded by Eagle Scout Eric Wood, Uhrmann describes the Spiritual Cenotaph as something that "entombs every spiritual book of authority from every religion of our service members. It symbolizes the faiths and beliefs of all the fallen soldiers out there."

The Warrior Obelisk Monument represents the four consequences of war: Missing in Action, Killed in Action, Wounded in Action, and Prisoner of War. It honors those who have suffered for American's very liberty.

The POW Remembrance Wall was designed by Uhrmann, funded and sponsored by Peter King, and painted by world-renowned artist Doron Viner.



With every element the AVM creates, Uhrmann researches it all. “I learn so much,” she asserts. “Take for example, our Presidents Preamble. It isn’t just a laundry list of all the United States Presidents; we include the events that the particular president is famous for, famous quotes, and more.”

With so much, she takes great pains to make sure that all of the information is not overwhelming to visitors and is easily understood. “If you are visiting the Bill of Rights Wall for example, each amendment is separated. That way people are not only reading, but they are also completely focused,” Uhrmann says. “One visitor told me that this was the first time she had ever read the Bill of Rights in its entirety before. I love seeing the parents and children visiting the park and seeing parents explain everything. It really opens up a conversation between them.”

Constructed in several phases, it seems that there is always another facet of the site to build and Uhrmann wouldn’t have it any other way. She discloses that upcoming plans for the park will include a prayer garden as an extension of the North Star Seating Area.

“The garden will be a complete Zen area,” she remarks. “When visitors want more privacy to reflect or honor a loved one, this place will be perfect. It is meant to be a spiritual place.” She mentions there will be a waterfall, and people will be completely surrounded by nature. They will also have the opportunity to write messages if they wish.

The Spiritual Cenotaph will be in view. The inclusive, religious spirituality is meant to give a sense of serenity and comfort to the grieving.

Uhrmann points to it as her favorite monument, because of the way it forges connections between people. As someone with a love of traveling all around the globe, she hunted various locations for just the right material for the Spiritual Cenotaph. “I learned so much researching every facet of the various religions and garnering as many books as I could. It was so rewarding to show the origins of how each of the various religions began. The project opened so many doors. I’ve met so many people.”

Touching her the most, was the gift of a Bible given to her by a man named Marcus Goch. “Upon seeing the finished center, he insisted he wanted his Bible as part of it.” Uhrmann shares. “I didn’t want to accept it at first as it was a gift from his parents, both who are gone now. It really says something about him that he wanted to share his gift with us.”

When asked what display attendees find most popular, Uhrmann shares that it is hands down the War Dog Memorial, sponsored by Bill Wynne, Brian and Lorriane Huster, Helen BeeBe, and Bill and Linda Sohl. Knowing that canines were as much a part of the armed forces as their human counterparts, the monument spotlights five different dogs in various wars and missions. Uhrmann, along with canine artist Ashley Bogosta, captured the real, authentic likeness of each dog. “Each lifelike dog is painted to exact detail,” Uhrmann tells. After researching each dog, visitors can see them in the exact landscape that made them famous. “Everyone has a soft spot for dogs,” Uhrmann quips.

The All Veterans Memorial hosts several notable and often heartwarming annual events. During Armed Forces Week, (one week before Memorial Day) they provide guided tours to students. “Here they come to learn the many details and hidden secrets throughout the park,” Uhrmann tells. “They learn the meaning behind each element and how it was built, as well as our rich American heritage and governments.”

On Memorial Day, the AVM comes alive. For all, it hosts a deep emotional connection. “Our Memorial Day Celebration always captivates those who are in attendance,” Uhrmann prides. “We begin with a patriotic medley performed on the bagpipes by Vietnam veteran Mark Noyes. “As Mark plays, re-enactors from every war present the period flags of the war lines to the Path to Enduring Freedom, acting as a perfect backdrop to our color guard. As each Service Flag is raised, Mark plays each branch of the service medley.”

She goes on to explain that they allow three families to set their fallen loved one's service paver at the Path to Enduring Freedom. In the past, they have had several World War II warriors set their own stone while their family members look on. The setting of the service paver is both videoed and photographed and given to the families after the ceremony. Both the Boy and the Girl Scouts participate, and Mount Olive Girl Scouts and Brownies also place small bouquets of flowers or candles at each fallen warrior at the Purple Heart Bridge.

There are unintended consequences of war, and with utter sensitivity and caring, the All Veteran’s Memorial hosts their POW/MIA 24 Hour Vigil. Taking place every third Friday and Saturday of every September, it is co-sponsored by the Morris County American Legion. This ceremony seeks to help the families by giving them a sense of peace and closure, knowing how

awful it is that a loved one has never returned home. This year, the All Veteran's Memorial went the extra step researching the names, ranks, serial numbers, and dates of disappearances of every New Jersey POW/MIA member out there. They then created dog tags containing that information. During the vigil they called out each name and info, securing the dog tags to the POW/MIA/PTSD Remembrance Wall.

Always reaching out a hand, the All Veterans Memorial participates in a myriad of outreach programs to enhance the quality of life for those who need it. Among them, are the Helping Homeless Heroes and Homeless Hounds Campaigns, providing backpacks filled with necessary items for the homeless? With the cooler weather approaching, it is the perfect time to aid those who do not have warm shelter.

"There are upwards of 3,000 homeless in Essex County alone," Uhrmann relates. They include pets in the campaign simply because "Shelters often do not accept people with pets, and owners won't leave them behind," Uhrmann tells. Backpacks contain items such as a Bible, hats, scarves, gloves, warm blankets, socks, a comprehensive first aid kit, food, water, even things like cold pills (in case of illness) and moisturizers, hygiene items, chapstick, as well as much more. For pets, they will include a box of treats, a blanket, water, and more.

Motivating others to connect, touching hearts, offering a beautiful, inclusive, non-political place to reflect, the All Veteran's Memorial puts 100% of their hearts into everything they do.

"I hope the All Veterans Memorial will continue to inspire others that it will show what an amazing country we have here. That it conveys that freedom is paid by the blood of our children. It's a reminder of the people's pride in their country and all that we have gone through," Uhrmann says. "The AVM is part of me." For further information or details, please call 973-479-4959 or visit www.allveteransmemorial.org.

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