

Hundreds Gather To Pray, Honor and Memorialize,

by Cheryl Conway

Close to 350 people gathered at the All Veterans Memorial Remembrance Ceremony on 30 May to honor military men and women who died while serving in the United States armed forces.



The 45-minute ceremony was held at the All Veterans Memorial in Budd Lake at 11:15 a.m. Through prayer, song, raising of the flags, speeches, placement of memorial wreaths and flowers, moment of silence, paver dedication and playing of “Taps,” the community came together on this breezy, hot day to mourn and remember military personnel who gave the ultimate sacrifice to protect American freedom.

“I was very pleased to see so many people take the time and make the effort to pay their respects to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice so that we could live free,” says Charlie Wood Uhrmann, founder of the AVM.

Prior to the ceremony, at 10:30 a.m., a dedication of the final element at the AVM was held to unveil the new prayer garden- The Reflection Sanctum. While the entire AVM is a memorial to honor, remember, memorialize and educate – visitors now have a dedicated, sacred area at the site to pray and reflect.

Dedication of the new prayer garden was led by Rev. Karen Gazzillo, who gave the sermon: Sacrifice, Grief and Healing during the dedication of the Reflection Sanctum.

In a special blessing, Gazzillo says “We ask for a special blessing on this Reflection Sanctum as a spiritual retreat so we can honestly deal with our feelings and heartache on the loss of our loved ones; to honor our loved ones in a powerful way by bringing healing and comfort in their memory.

“We thank you for this establishment, for this Reflection Sanctum to heal our body in mind and in spirit,” says Gazzillo. She says the sanctum is a sacred “place to meditate, to pray and to focus on sacrifice, grief and healing that we all need to cope with in our lives. Regardless of what wars our families served in, it is impossible to fully comprehend what a sacrifice it has been for all the young men and women who have served in a war. All ages, leaving their families behind and never knowing if they’d see their families again.”

She says it is also “equally unimaginable” to know “how many veterans were injured and died while fighting for our freedom,” and how many families’ lives are forever changed in order to “protect our freedom and our country.” Gazzillo says that “when a loved one dies, there’s such a deep feeling of sadness and sorrow.”

Coping with grief over a loved one, “it takes such a long time to recover. Being patient, reaching out to loved ones and friends- we have to seek healing.” Gazzillo went on to talk about the five phases of healing: Grief and denial; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance.

"We need to acknowledge and actively seek guidance," says Gazzillo. "It's important to ask for help; don't shy away. All of us need to do our part to reach out. Every single one of us is important. Everyone who has served, there's never going to be enough words to say 'thank you.'"

As part of the Reflection Sanctum dedication, an honorable service paver installation was held to memorialize U.S. Army Cpl. Hayden Allen Harris of Guys, Tenn., who died on Dec. 21, 2020, at the age of 20. Harris, an infantryman with the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Drum, joined the army in March 2019. Harris' family attended the dedication and placed flowers at his paver.

AVM Remembrance Day Ceremony

The Memorial Day ceremony at the AVM Ceremonial Complex commenced after the prayer garden dedication. Rolling Thunder made its grand entrance on motorcycles and raised the flags half-staff; and the Mt. Olive High School AFJROTC gave the opening procession on the complex with Mark Noyes playing bagpipe.

Retired Chief Master Sgt. Robert S. Bedell of the U.S. Air Force gave opening remarks with the history of Memorial Day, which officially began on May 30, 1868, and was known as Declaration Day, a time to set aside to recognize the "Civil War dead." By 1890, after World War I, all northern states recognized the day and all who died in wars, and by late 1800, all communities started to recognize it, says Bedell.

In 1966, the federal government by former President Lyndon B. Johnson declared Waterloo, N.Y., as the official birthplace of Memorial Day as it was the first community to celebrate the day in May 5, 1866, to "recognize it and make it a tradition," and an annual community event in which businesses close and residents visit and honor veterans' graves.

"This tradition continues throughout our nation," says Bedell.

Gazzillo gave the invocation and Ret. Col. Jeanne Murphy was the keynote speaker. Murphy is a retired army nurse with a 30-year military career with leadership positions for the U.S. Department of Defense, serving in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. Married to Centenary University President Dr. Bruce Murphy, her work has involved soldiering, community fitness and health promotion programs for elite Olympians, Paralympians to special needs populations.

While the event was held in the morning, 3 p.m. local time nationwide is the Congressionally approved national Moment of Remembrance to "reflect on sacrifices made by so many to provide freedom for all," says Murphy. Observed by Major League Baseball, NASCAR and Amtrak, "whose trains blast their whistles in unison at precisely 3 p.m.," she says.

"But despite the parades, picnics and celebrations, Memorial Day is a somber holiday to honor all veterans who are no longer with us." She says special focus is "honoring those killed during military service or through enemy contact" who "joined the U.S. military to be part of something greater than themselves to serve the American people."

According to Murphy, there have been 1.3 million people, of every race and ethnicity, who have died in the U.S. while serving in the U.S. military, whether as nurses, drivers, pilots and in the line of fire. She adds that nearly 2 million American women have served in the U.S. military. "We see many more women buried in honor of their service," says Murphy.

"Currently our 2.8 million service men and women make up less than one half of 1 percent of Americans," she says. But it is the whole family who serves, she says. There have been more than one million spouses, 2 million children and millions more relatives who have sacrificed those they love. "They represent the best that America has to offer," says Murphy. "Gold Star parents need to be honored."

Murphy also reported on fewer combat losses overseas and a steep increase in military deaths at home through accidents, suicides, homicides, traumatic brain injury and environmental exposure from burned pits and toxic chemicals that are causing higher rates in cancer and cardiovascular disease. She says more post-911 veterans are dying.

With these ongoing "preventable deaths," Murphy says, "we need to do everything we can to help veterans smoothly transition from military life to civilian life. It's our responsibility as citizens to remember" and "pledge to support" Gold Star parents and family members who grieve.

"Consider it honoring the unrecognized," she says. "Commit to support them."

Murphy says, "Never forget our veterans who understand the cost of our freedom. Their service to America is the greatest gift of all. However you celebrate the day, do it with their service in mind."

New Pavers/Wreaths Placed

Following Murphy's speech, 14 families were called up to install Honorable Service pavers in recognition of their loved one's military service. Their service was from various wars including World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Desert Storm/Desert Shield, Global War on Terror and peacetime. Two to note is Murphy's husband, Lt. Col. Bruce Murphy, who served 23 years in the U.S. Army during Desert Shield / Desert Storm; and Eric John Daniels Wood who has served two years in the South Carolina National Guard Air Force during the Global War on Terror. Wood is a MOHS alumnus, founding member of the AVM and son of AVM Founder Charlie Wood Uhrmann.

Wreaths were then placed by sponsoring organizations at each element of the AVM; Boy Scout and Girl Scouts presented flowers; a one-minute moment of silence "to remember sacrifice" of all wars was held; Gazzillo recited a benediction; and Rolling Thunder raised each flag circling the complex and the program.

In addition to the Reflection Sanctum, another last -minute element was added to the complex: Replica of the World War II Memorial in Belgium.

"The World War II Monument was added to enhance or bring attention to the Seward Mansion," explains Uhrmann. "Several years ago I supported the Mt. Olive Historical Society's application to receive a grant to restore the building. The Seward Mansion has two sister buildings: One at Normandy Beach and the other in Belgium. I have seen both buildings and have always admired their vast similarities. A

letter of support was requested of me, by Mt. Olive Historical Society President Thea Dunkle several years ago, and as a result, their grant was approved. I am hoping that one day, once the mansion is fully restored, the township would consider allowing us to display rare war relics and uniforms in one of the first-floor rooms.”

With these last two elements completed, the AVM displays 16 different elements and has been identified as “one of the most meaningful veterans memorials” as noted recently by a representative from the State Army, Uhrmann shares.

Elements include: Main Ceremonial Complex, Charlie Johnson Memorial Gazebo, Path To Enduring Freedom, Liberty Wall (Bill of Rights), War Dog Memorial, Battleship New Jersey Bollards, NorthStar Seating Area, Liberty Walkway, Warrior Obelisk, Spiritual Cenotaph, POW/MIA/PTSD Remembrance Wall, Ascension Bell, POW/MIA Podium, War Horse Memorial, Reflection Sanctum, Replica of the WWII Memorial in Belgium.

The AVM started 17 years ago with the Global War on Terror, and “now it’s the end of the war,” since the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan, Uhrmann says.

“The Reflection Sanctum is the final phase,” confirms Uhrmann. “No other element will be added. The existing elements will simply need to be maintained.”