

Memorial placed at veterans park

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Volunteers needed a crane to install the 2,000-pound stone at the park on Route 413, which is scheduled to open Nov. 6.

Vietnam veteran James Remer stood silent, his arms crossed, his breath held with anticipation as a dozen men on Wednesday carefully lowered 2,000 pounds of absolute black granite into the ground along Route 413 in Middletown.

The 4-foot by 10-foot memorial stone at Middletown Veterans Memorial Park was imported from India. It is etched with the words "Land of the free + because of the brave" and emblazoned with the image of a serviceman standing in the sunset.

"You think about bravery and try to imagine those young men in the foxholes," Remer said. "Some 19-year-old kid volunteering to fight on the other side of the world - that's bravery."

"I've waited 20 years for this moment," Remer continued. "I'm a Christian man. And I wanted a place where I could pray on Veterans Day. This is going to be that place."

Remer's vision for a local veterans park is fast becoming a reality. Four years ago, volunteers formed a committee to construct the 1-acre park, which is nearest to the intersection of Route 413 and Sycamore Ridge Road. The park is scheduled to open Nov. 6.

"Everything that has happened in this park was sponsored by a person or a business," Remer said. "I can't help but get emotional when I think about that - the idea of this park built by all these people."

The stone was valued at more than \$10,000 and donated by two companies - Onur Marble and Granite in Falls and KBA McHales of Middletown.

John McHale of KBA and Okan Memis of Onur Marble said they felt compelled to donate the stone after learning about the project.

McHale said he had long desired to be a part of memorial project, requiring the services of his company.

"I've wanted to do something like this for a long time," McHale said. "And this is such a great project."

The donated memorial stone stands amid a line of flags honoring the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy.

A Sherman tank used in World War II was moved from the Penn del American Legion Post to the Middletown memorial. The park also has a pavilion of picnic benches and a second ring of flags recognizing the nation, the county, prisoners of war and those missing in action.

Originally estimated at more than \$750,000, the Middletown Veterans Park is now expected to cost less than \$150,000 because of the volunteer labor and discounted rates from area businesses.

In 2009, the Middletown supervisors approved a \$250,000 loan to start the project. The loan is to be paid back within five years. The veterans committee is selling bricks for \$60 that will be inscribed with the name of a dead or living veteran and inserted into the ground along the circular walkway. To find out how to donate or for more information, call 215-547-3706.

Among the local unions who contributed to the park: Carpenters Local 1462, Electricians Local 269, Laborers Local 57, Operating Engineers Local 542, Cement Masons Local 595, Roofers Local 30 and Bricklayers and Allied Crafts Local One Pennsylvania-Delaware.

Matt Viola, a landscaper from the township's Sycamore Ridge section, has donated more than 1,000 hours of his time to build the park, Remer estimated.

Remer remained in the park Wednesday, long after township officials, volunteers and members of the media had left. Remer sat silently by the stone where, he said, he could finally pray.

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"Memorial placed at veterans park" Bucks County Courier Times 26 Aug 2010: A1