

## Veterans memorial park project enters final phase

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A veterans memorial park is mostly completed and could be the site of a grand opening ceremony on Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

James Remer's four-year labor of love - a Middletown park dedicated to veterans - is entering its final phase.

And as the project nears completion, the township resident and Vietnam War veteran said that more than anything, it's been a testament to the generosity of people coming together for a common cause.

Because of all the donations of labor, material and time given by individuals, unions, organizations and businesses throughout Middletown and the surrounding area, Remer estimated the park can be completed for about \$125,000, or roughly one-tenth of the original architect's estimate of \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million.

"The park is 70 to 75 percent done and so far we've spent about \$70,000," Remer told the township supervisors at their May 17 meeting.

Remer on Friday marveled at how much volunteerism has gone into the park, which is located on an acre piece of township land adjacent to the public works complex on Veterans Highway (Route 413).

Remer said residents and members of local carpenter, mason, electrician and other unions have donated hundreds of hours of labor. Area businesses also have stepped up to offer lots of free or discounted materials, he added.

"Whenever a business didn't give us something for free, it was at cost," Remer said. "We haven't had to pay full (retail) price for anything."

The help keeps coming, he said.

"I eat lunch up here almost every day," Remer said, referring to the park. "One day, an ironworker walks up to me, hands me a card and told me he wanted to offer his services to the park. Another day, a landscaper came up to me and offered to prune five large trees here for free. The whole thing has been incredible in terms of so many people from the community offering to help. It's been amazing."

Several elements of the park have been completed. There's a circular concrete walkway lined with several benches dedicated to veterans or some aspect of the military. For example, one is dedicated to dogs that have served in the military.

Nine flag poles have been erected. Three will fly the American, state and township flags while the other six will fly the flags of the all the branches of the U.S. military, which include the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine.

There's a pavilion that will house ceremonies and classes for students from Neshaminy and other local school districts coming to the park for field trips. An area near the pavilion is dedicated to Army Sgt. Jae Moon, a Middletown resident killed in Iraq on Christmas Day 2006.

On a concrete slab near the park's center is an old World War II Sherman tank, which was donated by the Pennel American Legion. Remer said he's been asked whether the tank - a stark reminder of war and violence - should be part of a park meant to be a place for reflection.

"I think it's definitely appropriate," Remer said. "It's eye-catching and will grab the attention of kids coming to the park. It's also a reminder that there is a price for freedom. It's not free."

The biggest component not yet done is a walking bridge, which will cross a small stream and connect the veterans park with a parking area shared with the public works complex. Remer said construction of the bridge requires two permits from the state Department of Environmental Protection that he expects to come through soon.

Also not done is a fence made of brick columns and wrought iron to be constructed near Veterans Highway. When finished, it will look much like the one at Mayor's Playground in Langhorne, Remer said.

He first approached Middletown officials about a veterans memorial park four years ago. A veterans committee, which includes Remer, was formed to plan and raise funds, and things rapidly started to come together, he said.

Remer credited Bucks County Commissioner and former township Supervisor Diane Marseglia with helping to nail down the location of the park and arranging the volunteer union help, among other things.

"Without Diane, we wouldn't be where we are today," Remer said.

To speed up construction of the park, the supervisors last year approved a \$250,000 loan to the veterans committee to be paid back over five years. Because of all the volunteer help and the pace of fundraising, about half that loan should be paid back almost immediately after the park is completed and the rest within a year or two, Remer said.

A lot of fundraising strategies have been used. Nearly all the elements of the park, including the benches and flag poles, are being sponsored by area residents or businesses at prices ranging from \$600 to \$3,000. The veterans committee is also selling bricks for \$60 apiece that will be inscribed with the name of a dead or living veteran and inserted into the ground along the circular walkway.

For \$100, a resident can buy two bricks. One will become part of the park and the other will be taken home by the buyer, said Remer.

He said he hopes to have a flag-raising ceremony at the park sometime around July 4 and a grand opening on Veterans Day, Nov. 11.

"In the end, the township will have a beautiful park for \$125,000 and no taxpayer money," Remer said.

To make a donation or for more information, call 215-431-4136 or 215-750-3825.

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