

Veterans event brings Wheatfield community unity



Clockwise: Wheatfield veterans summer event organizers Rita and Tom Kontak. • The family of Dechend Bateman and Adam Kusmierski poses in front of a tank at the event on Saturday. The children are, from left, Kingston Kusmierski, 10; Maya LoCocco, 8; and Brooke Turner. • Posing with Wheatfield Veterans Memorial Committee Chair Tom Kontak in front of a Huey helicopter at the memorial site are, from left, "Pin Ups For A Cause" members Lisa Przybyszewski, Anna Toomey, Heather Giuseppetti and Kim Torres.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY KAREN CARR KEEFE

Senior Contributing Writer

The Wheatfield Veterans Memorial was the gathering spot on Saturday for veterans and families to educate, reflect, share stories, express gratitude and enjoy camaraderie.

The Wheatfield Veterans Memorial Committee summer event provided an opportunity for veterans and first responders to teach the next generation about what it's like to serve one's country in wartime and in peace.

There were information tables where people could stop by to find out more about veterans groups. There was a display of fire engines, emergency vehicles and Army trucks – but a do-not-touch edict was not in effect. Kids got a chance to clamber into a fire engine, touch a truck or pose with the Veterans Memorial prized artifacts – a Vietnam-era Huey helicopter that was engineered and tested in Wheatfield at Bell Aircraft, and an Army tank from about 1959.

Niagara County Sheriff Michael Filicetti was there with sheriff's deputies to interact with the public.

"We love being out in the community," he said. "We love being involved and, anytime we come and spend time with our veterans and then also interact with the community, it's a great day for us. So, that's something we pride ourselves on at the sheriff's office."

Lee Chase, one of 12 members of the Wheatfield Veterans Memorial Committee, said, "The idea is to get people out, to see where this memorial is. We figured by bringing in some military vehicles and some fire trucks, we could get the parents to bring the kids, and then we could get the parents to know what's going on. It's the second year, so it seems to be successful. A lot of kids came out."

Military vehicles at the event were brought by James Tiede, an Army and Air Force veteran, and Robert Wark, whose father served in the military.

Tom Kontak, chair of the Memorial Committee, talked about the Huey helicopter permanently on site that bears the number 82 on its door. The helicopter itself was obtained from a guard unit in Connecticut, but the committee painted the "82" on it because of the significance of that number to Wheatfield Supervisor

Don MacSwan.

"Don was injured – he was shot in '68," Kontak relayed. "They're taking him off the field, he's semi-conscious. ... The last thing Don remembered seeing before they put him in the helicopter was that '82' on the door. So, when we got ahold of the helicopter and we started rebuilding the helicopter as you see it today, we didn't show Don that. He didn't see that helicopter for a year, until it came here. And you can imagine what that does to you emotionally. He saw the '82' for the first time since '68, and he was virtually almost in tears over here when we brought it" for the dedication ceremony.

"It was a proud moment for the Town of Wheatfield and it was just so much camaraderie," said Kim Torres, national founder of "Pin Ups For A Cause," a group that brought a lesson in history to life as it talked to people who came out to Saturday's event. She said the dedication ceremony for the memorial in August of 2021 was attended by many dignitaries, firefighters and members of the public. "This is another remarkable piece of history that is meant to be kept alive for many generations to come."

Torres said her group was invited to Saturday's event "to honor and uplift men and women that serve our great nation, as well as spend some time with families and welcome them to the event and obviously keep the history that's alive here in Wheatfield.

"It's wonderful to see all the fire trucks and Army trucks and camaraderie with families here in the community. It's all about keeping that history alive, but also bringing the community together for such a great purpose and reason."

The women from Pin Ups For A Cause wore 1940s and 1950s vintage attire in patriotic colors of red, white and blue. Torres emphasized that these weren't costumes: "Costumes are something that you would wear on Halloween, and this is our everyday attire that we would wear. We bring people back in time – just by looking at us."

Torres said the group raises money for great causes all throughout Western New York.

Tom and Rita Kontak organized the event. Rita was pleased to see how the children who attended

reacted to the presence of military, law enforcement and first responders – and their vehicles.

"They were very active and the ability to climb into the vehicles without any hesitation from the vehicle owners is, I think, one of the greatest draws because it's not something that kids can usually see – especially like the SWAT vehicles – new this year," she said. "You see them on TV and you never get that closeup opportunity."

Kontak said the fire companies handed out fire helmets for the kids, as well as other memorabilia.

"It's nice to bring them to the memorial, and hopefully the parents will explain to them the significance of the memorial," She said, noting the kids are becoming aware of what people before them have done for their freedom.



NOW HIRING

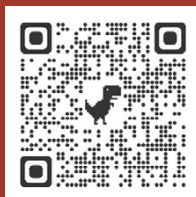
Niagara Wheatfield Central School District
5700 West Street, Sanborn

- Bus Drivers (Paid Training)
- LPN/Nurse
- Bus Attendants
- Substitute Teachers
- Support Personal Substitutes

(includes Teachers Aides, Monitor/Cleaners, Clerical, Cleaners)

FOR FULL-TIME & PART-TIME POSITIONS VISIT
WWW.NWSCD.ORG

For further information,
please contact Tom Stack, Assistant Superintendent
716-215-3009
tstack@nwscd.org



FARM MUSEUM FESTIVAL

Free Admission Public Invited

TRACTOR PARADE, GERMAN & AMERICAN CAR CRUISE

SATURDAY, JULY 22 • 8AM TO 4PM

SUNDAY, JULY 23 • 8AM TO 4PM

ANTIQUA TRACTORS • ARTISANS • FLEA MARKET • CRAFT SHOW
BAKE SALE • FOOD • MUSIC • BASKET AUCTION
LEWISTON CANINE SHOW • KIDS ACTIVITIES (INSIDE) • FARM MUSEUM EXHIBITS

HUGE BASKET AUCTION • WINNER 3:30 SUNDAY

FOR INFO: 716-957-4851, BONNIE
2660 Saunders Settlement Rd (Route 31), Sanborn, N.Y.
www.SanbornHistory.org



AERIAL IMAGING
K&D
ACTION PHOTO

• Events • Bridal • Aerial
FAA part 107 licensed
Insured

Kevin & Dawn Cobello
716-799-3838 or 716-471-6860
kdactionphoto@roadrunner.com
kdactionphotoaerialimaging.
zenfoliosite.com