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Island's Eagle Scout project adds to DeGlopper Memorial

Ryan Wellence also had opportunity to visit Normandy, France beach

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

Ryan Wellence was honored when the Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee approved his Eagle Scout project plan to provide benches for the memorial site at the intersection of Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard. He knew the story behind World War II hero DeGlopper, and was excited and happy to be part of a growing volunteer base creating the memorial for all Island veterans.

When the life-sized statue of 6-foot-7 DeGlopper is unveiled at 9:45 a.m. June 5, Wellence will feel a special closeness to the soldier who sacrificed his life for his troop during the bloody Battle of Normandy in 1944. That's because Wellence was able to walk the beach in Normandy, France, where DeGlopper fought, during his own Easter break trip to France in 2019 with his French class as a Grand Island High School senior.

"I knew his story before I arrived in France, but after standing in that spot, it became much heavier for me, and now the project has a much more emotional link to it. I now have more reasons to be happy about working on this project," explained Wellence, now a sophomore at Rochester Institute of Technology, where he is studying film production.

"It was a very surreal moment," he recalls. "The beach was very wide, desolate and beautiful, but while I was standing there listening to the story of what occurred there during the war, it just put me in that moment. It became



Eagle Scout Ryan Wellence is seated on his finished bench.

quite a solemn place for me." In the summer before his junior year of high school, Scott Swagler, the longtime leader of Boy Scout Troop 630, introduced Wellence to a former Troop 630 Eagle Scout, Keith Wegrzyn, a volunteer who led the team to design the DeGlopper Memorial Space. They discussed the project and a possible Eagle Scout project for Wellence before settling on pro-

viding the park benches that sit on concrete slabs throughout the space.

"As a former Eagle Scout from Troop 630, I wanted to have them involved in this community-wide project and I immediately connected with Ryan because I liked his thought process about the bench project," explained Wegrzyn, general manager of Russo Development, Inc. "When we spoke about our plans for the KIAs (Killed in Action) displays, Ryan immediately suggested a bench for the

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Brouhaha over the blue bridges

Back in the late '90s blue was a hot topic

STORY AND PHOTO BY
KAREN CARR KEEFE
EDITOR

I love taking photos of "The Blue Bridge," especially the two South Grand Island Bridges, because they are in my part of town. I also remember that there was a bit of a kerfuffle – some cheers and jeers – when the decision was made to paint the bridges blue.

Some called it "electric blue" back in the late '90s when the bridges went from pale, dull green to a vibrant hue of blue.

Christopher Caile wrote a story about the "new" color for the Aug. 23, 1997, edition of the Dispatch. Gov. George Pataki had recently announced the \$15.8 million bridge repair project, and the Thruway Authority wanted public input to tailor the project to local tastes.

Caile's headline was "Bridges to get the blues." Many journalists, myself among them, love to make puns or use clichés in headlines or captions – cutlines, as we call them. Bad puns, lame clichés, the more overused the better. But Caile's headline was catchy, as was his lead: "If you like blue, you'll love the new color selected for Grand Island's two north bridges."

Caile wrote that the Thruway Authority



The late afternoon sun on a recent Sunday puts the South Grand Island Bridges in a new light.

hosted a meeting in Grand Island Town Hall for elected officials of Grand Island and Niagara Falls to select a color for the bridges. They had announced that local officials would be given a chance to voice their opinions about the paint color, and the choices

included blue, gray, green and brown.

The engineering and architectural firm of Foit Albert got some help from a State Department of Transportation official to display

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Island Prescription Center gets 100 doses of COVID vaccine

BY KAREN CARR KEEFE
EDITOR

On Tuesday, Island Prescription Center received 100 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, their first shipment since the vaccine rollout.

By sometime today, those doses will likely be all be gone, and 100 senior citizens, customers of the center, will have had their first shot. As a pharmacy, the prescription center is authorized by the state Department of Health to vaccinate only those who are 65 and older, as is the case also with two other Grand Island pharmacies, Rite Aid and Tops.

Once Island Prescription Center got word the allocation was on its way, owner and pharmacist Michael Manuszewski and his staff immediately began booking appointments for vaccinations to take place Thursday and today. Their initial outreach is based on the list of those whose previous appointments were canceled due to lack of vaccine supply.

Island Prescription Center is among many area pharmacies, medical centers and clinics that were ready to roll, but saw their appointments turn into disappointments because the supply from the state just wasn't there.

Manuszewski said that typically, the vaccine shipments would come every week, but since this was their first one, it's hard to predict when the next one will happen.

"So far, this week, honestly in Western New York, I'm the only pharmacy that I know that got any. To me, it seems like the state is keeping most of it to do at their clinics. They're not really releasing much to the general public." I know a lot of pharmacies have gotten five or six shipments, but did not get any this time. I know Rite Aid and Tops have gotten it sporadically. I don't think they get it every week. I know people have said they've gotten it at Tops," he said.

The appointment-only vaccinations this week at Island Prescription Center were scheduled to go from 10 a.m. to 5 or 6 p.m., depending on how long it takes to complete them.

"We're starting with our customers first that have already reached out to us. And then, a lot of them have gotten it other plac-

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