

DeGlopper Memorial is close to fundraising goal

Chris Taylor vividly recalls his uncle Phil's battle in Vietnam

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

Toward the end of the week before Memorial Day, Grand Island residents will receive the fourth and final direct mail solicitation from the DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee. The team is working toward raising the final \$140,000 for its \$750,000 project – a life-sized statue of World War II hero Pfc. Charles N. DeGlopper. A public unveiling is scheduled for Saturday, June 5.

"The good news is we have raised enough money, mostly through the generosity of Islanders, to present a successful unveiling for the public," explained Chris Taylor, a United States Air Force veteran and chair of the fundraising committee. "The remaining funds will go a long way in helping us finish this memorial and forever have a place in the center of our beautiful island that will properly pay respect to these service men, women and their families."

The solicitation residents will receive includes donation boxes for \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100 and other.

"These mailers are expensive to do, but they have been our most successful fundraiser in terms of a one-time event," he said. "It is not so much about the amount of the donation, but this gives every resident the opportunity to say, 'I helped to build the DeGlopper Memorial.'

"This entire project has truly been Islanders coming together and helping us build something that will be here forever that recognizes Island veterans as far back as the Civil War. The notes donors put in the envelope are so touching. They truly make all the hours we have put into the project over the last several years so worthwhile."

For Taylor, serving on the committee is a labor of love because his uncle, U.S. Army Sgt. Philip C. Taylor, is listed on the Killed in Action monument in the park. Taylor's father,

Chris, also served in the Army from 1978-90. It was the inspiration from his dad that led young Chris to be "delayed enlisted" into the Air Force while he was a junior at Grand Island High School in 1999.

"I just knew forever and ever that I wanted to serve our country," said the co-owner and founder of Certified AutoBrokers on Grand Island Boulevard, who is married with two young children at home and soon will begin construction of a nearly \$4 million building at Certified.

The young businessman said he spent summers with his dad in Lakeland, Florida. The house had a wall that was dedicated to his uncle Phil. He recalled the stories in vivid detail his dad told him about the horrific end to his uncle's life.

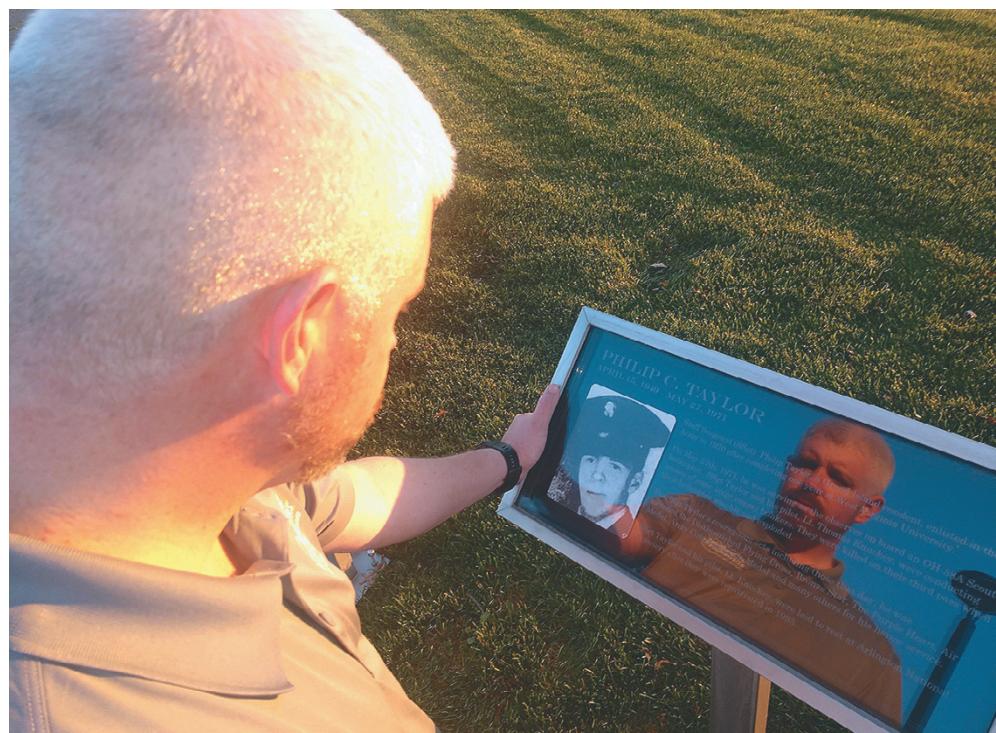
Staff Sgt. Taylor, who had enlisted in the Army in 1970, was the observer on an OH-58A Scout helicopter that was conducting passes of large enemy bunkers over Cambodia – an area that was off limits for U.S. air traffic. They decided to make one last pass when enemy ground missiles struck the helicopter and it exploded into several pieces. Taylor's family, who was presented several medals for his courageous acts that day, was killed on Cambodian soil during an air strike at the tail end of the Vietnam War on May 27, 1971.

Because it occurred in Cambodia, the remains were not immediately found. Taylor's father flew a POW/MIA flag at his house and family members all wore the POW bracelets.

Taylor will never forget visiting his dad as a 13-year-old in August of 1993. His dad received a call from an Army official saying they had found his brother's remains and they would like to bring them to Lakeland for an official military burial service.

On Aug. 21, 1993 – three weeks after the phone call – a full military contingent arrived for a ceremony Taylor will never forget.

"It has had a lasting memory for me," he said. "That is why this DeGlopper Memorial



Chris Taylor at the Killed in Action plaque honoring his uncle, Phillip C. Taylor, in DeGlopper Memorial Park.

is so important. It is not just the veterans we are recognizing, but all their families and the memories and stories they will tell while they are there. That is why we are doing this."

He added, "We have raised nearly \$600,000 over the past several years and it has mostly come in the form of small donations from families and Island residents. Our fundraising is not big corporate sponsors coming in with large checks – but we certainly would take them if they were interested in donating. It has been funded and supported, both financially and in-kind, by small businesses and residents, and we would like to thank all the families who have supported us during our many fundraisers."

Secretary and fundraising co-chair Elsie Martino said the funds raised allowed the committee to acquire the land; pay for the life-sized sculpture of DeGlopper; add sidewalks and drainage; pave the parking lot; light the KIA stands for each hero; refurbish the KIA Monument; install sprinklers; and incorporate the granite memorial walls for all veterans, and brick pavers for the Gold Star around the flag and landscaping.

With the additional funds raised, the following big items can be obtained:

- Four brass plaques



Chris Taylor points to his uncle's name on the Killed in Action monument under those killed during the Vietnam War.

around the black granite base of the DeGlopper statue (\$20,000). These plaques, designed by David Knox of Armento Plaques, with a 54-inch bottom width, 48-inch top width and 24-inches high, will tell DeGlopper's story and will include the Congressional Medal of Honor citation, etchings of his prominent medals and badges, and "For God and Country" printed in Latin.

• 4-foot-by-6-foot granite monument with a bugle carved into the top of it with the lyrics of taps on the monument (\$15,000).

• A 4-foot-by-6-foot granite memorial signifying the Purple Heart with Eagle's Wings etched into it (\$15,000).

Taylor sat back during an interview at Tim Hortons and reflected on all the hours committee members have spent on this project.

"We can never forget the sacrifices of those who fought for this great country and those who made the ultimate sacrifice and left their families behind right here on Grand Island. This will be a great way to show that we will never forget," he said.

Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Statue and Killed in Action Plaques Unveiling Saturday, June 5, 2021, 9:45 a.m.

Grand Island Boulevard at the corner of Baseline Road



PHILIP C. TAYLOR April 15, 1949 - May 27, 1971



Staff Sergeant (SSgt) Taylor, a Grand Island resident, enlisted in the Army in 1970 after completing one year at West Virginia University.

On May 27th, 1971, he was serving as the observer on board an OH-58A Scout helicopter. SSgt Taylor and his pilot, Lt. Thomas Knuckey were conducting passes of some large enemy bunkers. They were killed on their third pass when their helicopter was hit and exploded at tree top level.

For SSgt. Taylor's courageous acts that day and prior to that day, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, The Purple Heart, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal and many other medals for his service.

SSgt. Taylor and his pilot, Lt. Knuckey were laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery after they were repatriated in 1993.

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