

DeGlopper Memorial nears magnificent public unveiling

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

After several years of meetings, brainstorming, working long hours, fundraising and laboring to create a world-class tribute to Grand Island's War II hero and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Pfc. Charles N. DeGlopper – along with recognizing 16 other Killed in Action soldiers and all town veterans dating back to the Civil War – the event is only eight days away.

At 9:45 a.m. sharp Saturday, June 5, the most solemn military tribute in Grand Island history will occur at the DeGlopper Memorial at the intersection of Grand Island Boulevard and Baseline Road when the larger-than-life-sized, 6-foot-7 sculpture is unveiled.

The ceremony will begin with a wreath presented for the 68 Civil War veterans whose names are engraved in stones near the statue; a roll call of the Island's KIAs with short bios read by a family or committee member; tributes to the Unknown Soldier and DeGlopper; a Prayer to the Fallen; a rifle salute; taps; and a tribute to past, present and enlisted members of the armed forces. After the unveiling of the statue, which was sculpted by Susan Geissler of Youngstown, there will be a military musical salute to close the program.



"It will truly be impressive," said Ray DeGlopper, the soft-spoken nephew of the war hero and commander of Grand Island's American Legion Post No. 1346. "What is so nice about this project is how it has brought so many Grand Island residents together to help us any way they can, either by donating a few dollars or by volunteering at the site."

DeGlopper said nearly 50 members of his family will travel to Grand Island for this prestigious event. His brother, Robert Charles "Charlie" DeGlopper, 71, of North Carolina, will read the description honoring his uncle.

On Thursday, DeGlopper and other members of the committee raised the ninth and final flag at the northern end of the site – the 82nd Airborne flag from Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That was DeGlopper's division when he was killed during the Battle of Normandy while protecting members of his platoon on June 9, 1944.

The Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee announced the following road closures for local traffic from 9:30 a.m. until approximately 11:45 a.m.: From the Grand Island Boulevard and Baseline Road intersection north to the post office service entrance on Baseline Road and north to Tim Hortons on Grand Island Boulevard.

Parking and seating will be limited. There will be a handicap drop-off access at the entrance to the site from Baseline Road only. To respect the event's dignity, the committee kindly requests everyone is seated before the ceremony begins. The ceremony will take place rain or shine; there will be no shelter for inclement weather, and guests will be encouraged to bring their own chairs.

The stage will be placed on the pavement at the northeast end of the site and there will be no seating on the south side of the granite wall. The committee is work-



Members of the East Park Garden Club, from top down, Rosemary Madejski, Debbie Pirson and Rosalie Madejski, along with other club members, planted flowers at the DeGlopper Memorial this week. They will water, weed and maintain the gardens throughout the summer.

ing on livestreaming the event on its website. All state COVID-19 protocols/restrictions that are effective on June 5 will be in place, including mask wearing and social distancing.

On Saturday at 8 a.m., the committee is looking for volunteers to assist at a work party to clean the site for the town's Memorial Day service, which begins at 10 a.m. Monday. Elsie Martino, committee secretary, asked if volunteers could bring weed whackers, leaf blowers, buckets, soap and paper towels to clean the site. She said they will be back to do a similar cleanup at 9 a.m. Friday, June 4, and again, volunteers are needed.

"Every person could make a difference in helping us present a beautiful site for our guests on Memorial Day and at the unveiling," she said. "Whatever you can do, we are appreciative."

Chris Taylor, chair of fundraising, said the DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee will have a table at the Memorial Day ceremony collecting financial donations as it attempts to close a \$100,000 gap of its nearly \$750,000 bud-

get. Martino encouraged those interested to also visit www.degloppermemorial.org. The committee is taking orders for pavers and granite stones with newly revised forms and prices. They are available on the website.

Dan "Double D" Drexelius, project manager of the DeGlopper Memorial and the Miracle League field inside Veterans Park, said these two experiences have been a personal labor of love.

"They have both touched my heart in a special way," explained Drexelius, who used his years of experience in the construction business to solicit assistance from vendors on both projects. "It is a great experience working with the handicapped children at the Miracle League, and the veterans are an awesome group of individuals who served our country, so we can live in freedom."

"I never served in the military, but I have learned so much listening to their stories. Memorial Day is a day for everyone in this country to remember those who could not come back. Through this journey, we hear of Island veterans who lied about their age so they could serve our country during World War II. Read the plaque we created for the Killed in Action veterans. Each one is heart-breaking stories of true bravery. Helping here and at the Miracle League is my way of giving back to our community."

Each week, the Island Dispatch has showcased the Killed in Action veterans. DeGlopper will be the final story on June 4.

The 18th plaque that surrounds the KIA monument at the south end of the site is the Unknown Soldier. Keith Wegrzyn, who led the team to design the entire DeGlopper

SEE DEGLOPPER continued on Page 20

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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

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Artwork by Morgan Schaefer



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