



The men on the DeGlopper Expansion Committee stand at the DeGlopper Memorial. They are, from left, former Town Board member Gary Roesch; Robert Haag; former deputy town supervisor James Sharpe; Ray DeGlopper, nephew of Charles DeGlopper and vice president (American Legion); Chairman Erik Anderson of the Moose Lodge; Alan Lee, vice chairman (VFW); project manager Dan Drexelius; Joe Mesmer; Keith Wegrzyn, who has spearheaded the effort to place the Killed In Action plaques at the Memorial; Dan McMahon; and former Councilman Dan Robillard, administrative chairman. [Photo by Karen Carr Keefe]

Honoring Island heroes

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hometown when a life-sized bronze statue will be unveiled at The DeGlopper Memorial, Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard, culminating years of planning, hard work and donations of time, in-kind items and cash from veterans, Grand Island residents, Boys and Girl Scouts and Grand Island High School students.

Ray DeGlopper, 80, was a youngster living on his family's farm when his Uncle Charles went off to war. As a proud veteran and the commander of the American Legion Post 1346 on Grand Island, he is looking forward to the unveiling of the statue, which he has inspected and approved. "I truly appreciate what has been done for my uncle immensely," he said.

"It's just fantastic," said Grand Island Supervisor John C. Whitney, as his eyes

was the Greatest Generation and to honor our hometown hero, Charles DeGlopper, a Medal of Honor recipient, who gave his life at such a young age to save his company in battle is beyond words. I am so proud of our entire community for coming together on this wonderful project in the center of our town."

Charles N. DeGlopper Park Dedicated
On Memorial Day 1962, the American Legion Post 1346, appropriated and dedicated Charles N. DeGlopper Park at the intersection of Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard. The Killed in Action monument was moved there and the World War II 75-millimeter pack Howitzer Cannon at the southern tip of the park was brought to the Island by George Bower, a veteran and longtime member of the Charles N. DeGlopper Veterans of Foreign War Post 9249. "It is a daily reminder of those who gave up their lives for their

watered when reflecting upon what DeGlopper means to the town. "That country," Bower said at the time.

There once was a Mobil gas station at the northern end of the park, but its deed was transferred from the DeGlopper Expansion Committee to the DeGlopper VFW Post 9249, which is using its 501c(3) status for the land, which is not referred to as a park any longer, but simply The DeGlopper Memorial. The grass had always been cared for by the Town Parks Department and the Auxiliary of the American Legion and VFW Post would make sure there were flowers around the KIA Monument.

The Committee makes Plans

Six years ago, Park Department Director Thomas Dworak and employees Eric Anderson and Jerad Billica began brainstorming ways they could create a more aesthetically pleasing look for the space while still honoring the veterans represented there. After a few meetings local contractor Dan "Double D" Drexelius was brought into the conversation along with members of the local American Legion and DeGlopper Memorial VFW Post. Soon the first committee of the DeGlopper Expansion Committee was formed with Anderson of the Moose Lodge, selected as chairman; Ray DeGlopper, the cousin of Charles, vice chairman (American Legion); Alan Lee, vice chairman (VFW); Fred Wornick, vice chairman (American Legion); James Sharpe, treasury committee, (American Legion), Amy Garten, secretary (Moose), Deb Bota and Dworak, advisers, Dan Robillard, administrative chairman and Drexelius, project manager. Since then, changes have been made to the all-volunteer board, including Chris Taylor as fundraising chairman; Dworak and Wornick have since resigned, and former Town

High School graduate who worked for him during the summers while going to school. He is now general manager of Russo Development Inc., specializing in site work development and he turned out to be a key player in the development of what will be unveiled on June 5.

Before any design work began, the committee unanimously agreed on one vision: A large statue of Pfc. Charles N. DeGlopper would be commissioned and they would create as much of the Battle of Normandy as they could with their hometown hero defending his men in action, which are now the local veterans inscribed on the bricks around his statue and on the walls behind him. The list includes 68 Island residents who fought in the Civil War. DeGlopper's statue would be surrounded by landscaping to replicate the bloody scene of his last heroic battle.

With a background in landscape design and a bachelor's degree in construction management, Wegrzyn took the ideas that were floated around the table and created a 3D walk through of a potential design for the entire property. Melanie Anderson, an architect from Clarke Patterson Lee, and Mark Mistretta RLA, ASLA, of Villani's Landscape also created designs that were presented to the board during a meeting in early 2017.

"After showcasing the three designs, we decided I would incorporate small aspects of all three into one 3D model in which we could walk the board through via projection," Wegrzyn explained during a recent meeting at the DeGlopper VFW Post.

The KIA Monument

In addition to the statue and granite walls inscribed with past and present soldiers, the statue's base would be in the middle of a star representing the five branches of the military, the Gold Star Mothers, the KIA Monument and a way to showcase each soldier and their story and the canon. There also would be several flags lining the walls. The board unanimously approved the design and the committee then began working toward an unveiling that was originally scheduled for last June but

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Readers invited to complete Islandwide survey

Welcome to our first Islandwide edition of the Dispatch for 2021. We hope you enjoy the articles and photos, including: a kickoff to our DeGlopper killed in action series, honoring those who gave their lives in defense of this country; an update on the Niagara River Greenway bike trail and its Grand Island connection; a feature on a local piano player who has taken lessons online; and the latest on this year's Relay For Life.

While Karen Keefe, Mike Billoni, Alice Gerard and the team have worked diligently to present news you can use, we know there's always room for improvement.

We invite you to visit the Dispatch website, www.wnypapers.com, and complete our reader survey.

Those participating will enter to win a prize from our amazing advertisers.

See the full-page ad in today's paper for more details.

As always, thank you for reading your local source for everything Grand Island.

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



EDWARD P. PIERCE May 18, 1894 - September 29, 1918



Private First Class (PFC) Edward Pierce was the son of prominent Buffalo grain merchant George E. Pierce and spent summers on the large Pierce Farm on the West River. He enlisted in the Army in 1918 and served with the 27th Division, American Expeditionary Forces, 108th Infantry Regiment, D Company, during World War I.

PFC Pierce and D Company were entrenched in the battle that broke the Hindenburg Line on the day he gave his life. For his heroic actions he was awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross. The citation reads: "For extraordinary heroism in action near Ronssoy, France, September 29, 1918. Private Pierce left shelter, went into an open field under heavy machine-gun and shell fire, and dragged a wounded soldier to safety. This courageous soldier was killed while advancing with his company later in the action."

PFC Pierce was also awarded the Conspicuous Service Medal. His gravestone in Forest Lawn Cemetery includes the inscription: "To Die As He Died Means That He Lives Forever."

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