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Setting sites on Island heroes

Community rallies around DeGlopper Memorial; Soldiers Killed in Action are etched in our hearts

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

Private First Class Charles N. DeGlopper was a 22-year-old United States Army soldier fighting for his country on June 9, 1944, during the Battle of Normandy campaign in World War II when he was compelled to make a split-second decision that ultimately cost him his life as he was killed in action protecting his fellow soldiers.

The Grand Island native was a member of Company C, 325th Glider Infantry, which was advancing to secure a bridgehead across the Merderet River at LaFiere, France. At dawn, the platoon had penetrated an outer line of machine guns and riflemen, but in doing so they had become cut off from the rest of the company. Vastly superior German forces began a decimation of the stricken unit and put in motion a flanking maneuver that would have completely exposed the American platoon in a shallow roadside ditch where it had taken cover.

DeGlopper's brave action

At 6-foot-7, and despite himself coming under increased fire, Pfc. DeGlopper stood up and began to fire his Browning automatic rifle at the attacking Germans in an attempt to suppress their fire and allow his comrades to retreat. Scorning a concentration of enemy automatic weapons and rifle fire, DeGlopper climbed out of the ditch and stood tall on the road in full view of the German enemies. He sprayed the hostile positions with assault fire and, despite being shot and wounded, he continued shooting. Struck again, he began to fall but his sheer determination and fighting spirit allowed him to kneel as he continued firing



American Legion Post 1346 dedicated Charles N. DeGlopper Park at the intersection of Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard. A life sized statue of deGlopper will be placed at the memorial. (Aerial Photo by Robert Haag)

round after round until, he ultimately was killed on the road.

The Medal of Honor

Despite making the ultimate sacrifice in fighting for his country, DeGlopper was successful in drawing the enemy's attention away from his fellow soldiers, who continued the fight from a more advantageous position.

Less than two years after DeGlopper was killed in action, President Harry S. Truman, in the name of Congress, awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously to Private First-Class Charles N. DeGlopper. The Medal of Honor is the highest award presented by the U.S. military. On March 10, 1946, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Leland S. Hobbs travelled to Grand Island to present

the medal to his father, Charles L. DeGlopper, in a ceremony at Trinity Evangelical United Brethren Church on Whitehaven Road.

Life-sized Statue to Honor DeGlopper

On June 5, 2021, four days shy of the 77th anniversary of his death, DeGlopper will receive the ultimate recognition in his

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Filling the gaps in Greenway Shoreline Trail

Planners: Options on East River, GI Blvd., West River Trail all pose problems



From left, Jim Sharpe, Greg Stevens, Sue Tomkins, Celia Spacone, David Pratt and Deborah Billoni during a ride through the trails last summer. They are on the trails committee of Sharpe's Long Range Planning Committee. Billoni is an appointed member of the town's Long Range Planning Committee.

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

On a recent late January afternoon when skiing, snowboarding or sledding were the optimum outdoor activities, Gregory D. Stevens, Michelle Lockett and Jim Sharpe were talking about bicycling and hiking on Grand Island and the urgency to bring together New York state, Erie County and Grand Island officials to create a plan to improve bike lanes, connect trails and position the Island as a true ecotourism destination.

"Having a plan that rolls out five years of improvements to roads, waterways and trails on Grand Island is critical and now is the time to do that," explained Stevens, the executive director of the Niagara River Greenway Commission. A Buffalo native, he earned a bachelor's degree in biochemistry at Harvard University and spent many years working overseas. He returned to Western New York in 2005, dedicating much of his volunteer time to building organizational capacity to restore water quality and promoting public enthusiasm for local waterfronts.

The former chairman of the Niagara River Greenway board of directors has overseen the creation of the Greenway Shoreline Trail 37 miles from Lackawanna to Fort Niagara in Youngstown. Grand Island is the star attraction of the trail for bicyclists, runners and walkers, but it currently poses the greatest challenges for Stevens and

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