

Park will dedicate memorial

Published: Thu, May 26, 2005

The monument will be updated with new names weekly.

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HERMITAGE, Pa. — A new memorial to servicemen and women who died fighting terror will be dedicated Monday at Hillcrest Memorial Park after the Hermitage Memorial Day Parade.

Major Gen. Carol A. Kennedy, commanding general of the 99th Regional Readiness Command of Oakdale, Pa., will be the speaker. Several families of service members who have died will be present.

The steel and glass monument will be in the center of 444 U.S. flags, which commemorate each day of the Iranian Hostage Crisis of November 1979 to January 1981.

Six stainless steel frames, 12 feet tall by 4 feet wide, stand in a semicircle around the center fountain. The first 2 feet of the towers are stainless steel; above are five glass panels, 2 feet high by 4 feet wide. Etched in the dark glass are names of all killed in action.

The memorial will commemorate not only the military personnel who have died in the war on terror, but all who have died fighting terrorism since 1975.

The memorial is part of the War on Terror Foundation, a nonprofit organization and educational resource honoring those who gave their lives to preserve freedom. The foundation is not connected to the government or military and receives funding from donors. Tom Flynn, foundation president and owner of Hillcrest Memorial Park, said the foundation hopes to teach people there is a price for freedom.

Keeping it current

Flynn said new names will be etched on the memorial each week.

"It will be kept up and added to on a weekly basis; we want it to be a living memorial. The names will be in chronological order, in real time," he said.

The first name etched in the glass is Col. Paul R. Shaffer, killed in 1975. The eight service members killed trying to rescue the American hostages in the Iranian Hostage Crisis in 1979-80 and the 82 service members who died at the Pentagon in the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks are included, Flynn said.

Other names include Air Force Master Sgt. Evander E. Andrews, 36, the first serviceman to die in Afghanistan, killed Oct. 10, 2001; and Marines Maj. Jay Thomas Aubin, 36, the first serviceman to die in Iraq, killed March 21, 2003.

Flynn said there are 2,256 names on the monument and the most recent names were added May 21. As of May 25, 60 service members have died this month and 344 have died this year in the war on terror, Flynn said.

"It's a different kind of war than any we have seen before; it's been going on for 30 years. It's going on all over the world, all the time," he said.

One of the things that distinguishes this war from others is the number of women who have died in action, Flynn said.

"Dozens of women have died. Each tablet holds 80 names, and I don't think there's one without a woman's name on it; some have three or four," he said.

Flynn said the project was something he could do for his country to ensure those who gave their lives to preserve freedom received a monument quickly.

First phase

The project took less than six months from the first idea to dedication. Flynn said the idea came Dec. 1, 2004, and ground was broken Dec. 21.

"I got the idea looking at pictures of those service members who had died. When you start looking at faces, that's what pulls you in," he said.

In addition to the monument, Flynn said the foundation is putting together a Web site with biographies, pictures, and audio and video clips from those who have died. The site, www.WarOnTerror.org, will be made available Memorial Day weekend.

The monument is the first phase of the project and cost about \$1 million, Flynn said. Total cost will be about \$5 million.

The monument was made by local companies and everything was donated, or given at cost or below, Flynn said.

IKM Inc. of Pittsburgh designed and constructed the monuments for \$300,000. Hillcrest donated the two acres, Wesex Construction of West Middlesex, Pa. donated the steel frames, and Warren Glass and Paint of Warren sold the glass at cost or below, Flynn said.

Hillcrest Memorial Park is also the site of the Avenue of 444 Flags, which honors the number of days Americans were held hostage in Iran in 1979-81.