

Nemaha County Native Encourages Support For Local Veterans Memorial

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Allan Casey, Johnson native, returned to Nemaha County Friday night, May 21, to help kick off the Nemaha County Veterans Memorial project. The memorial, to be built in the Auburn Legion Memorial Park, will honor the county's World War II veterans.

"We will dedicate this memorial to those who died in that war, but more than that, we dedicate it to those of us who survived that war and came back to this county to live our lives. We were fortunate because we came back to a country that honored us for our services," Casey said.

A majority of the World War II veterans are no longer with us, but Casey said that there is a legacy left to us from the World War II experience.

"It is the rediscovery of our capacity to care, to give and to honor," he said.

"It is only fitting that some kind of a permanent memorial be erected that will always remind surviving generations of the great service that was rendered by these veterans to our country. There is a space in the Legion Memorial Park in Auburn where such a monument can be erected. I want to encourage all of you to support the building of this monument with your voices and your money. As a World War II veteran, I certainly want to see this project succeed," Casey said.

He and his wife, Margie, contributed \$1,000 towards the construction cost.

Casey served in World War II with the Infantry Company 1st. He was a sergeant with Gen. George Patton's Army in Europe. In 2005, on the 60th anniversary of V-E Day in Europe, Casey was among 15 who served with the 17th Division who went to the Czech Republic. They were presented medals by the president of the Czech Republic.

"They called our unit 'the liberators of Czechoslovakia. When I was there, they were just erecting a statute of Gen. Patton at Pilsen, Czech Republic. It was a tribute to the 97th Division for being their liberators," Casey said.

At the May 21 event, Casey wore a jacket with the unit's patch. Coincidentally, 2010 marked the 40th anniversary of the release of the movie "Patton," which won seven Oscars, including Best Picture.

A 50-year funeral director at Auburn, Casey also spoke Sunday, May 23, at the annual patriotic service at Martin Luther Church south of Johnson. Casey and his wife live at Lincoln.

About 100 persons attended the program at Bender-Reese American Legion Post No. 330, Johnson. Leon Deunk, Cortland, American Legion state commander, attended.

Monty Lovelace, Nemaha County Veterans Memorial committee chairman, recognized the committee who has worked on the project three years. Lovelace thanked all veterans and spouses for their service.

"The freedoms we take for granted are because of the sacrifices those who served the United States made. We want to build this memorial to those who have served and continue to serve," Lovelace said.

The memorial will be on the west side of Legion Memorial Park and south of the entrance. It will consist of five granite and stone wings coming off the points of a star to symbolize the branches of service. One side of the wings will have the engraved names of veterans listed. The other side will include etched drawings of historical images. In the center of the star will be a pedestal engraved with the branches of the U.S. armed forces: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy. Three flags will be placed around the area, along with benches, lighting and a flagstone walkway. A sign will also be placed at the entrance along with appropriate

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landscaping.

“The memorial is for everyone. We want to honor all individuals who served in all branches of the U.S. armed forces. We have to work together to make this happen,” Lovelace said.

From April 1-May 21, there was \$31,000 raised. Cost is about \$85,000. Lovelace said that the committee wants to raise all funds by Dec. 31, 2010, begin construction next spring and have the memorial built by Memorial Day 2011.

Contributions of \$150 are being sought for the Wall of Honor, where a specific veteran’s name will be engraved on the wall.

“We want to get as many veterans as possible including all deceased veterans listed on the memorial,” Lovelace said.

Benches will be available for purchase. Larger contributions will be needed to cover those who cannot afford to contribute or no longer have family in the area, Lovelace said.

There were 104 Nemaha County residents who died while serving the United States in the U.S. armed forces.

“We’re excited about this project. It’ll be a great addition to Legion Memorial Park. It’s a great way to honor those who served the United States,” Lovelace concluded.