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Honor Roll to be dedicated tomorrow

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SOUTHBRIDGE — It took years of planning and months of construction to bring the Southbridge Veterans' Honor Roll to life, along with some granite, bronze plaques, and fiber-optic lighting.

All of that work will culminate with a ceremony tomorrow to dedicate what Honor Roll Committee Chairman Edmund T. Skonieczny called “the most unique monument in the state.”

The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. at the monument, located in Dresser Park, on Main Street (Route 131). It will kick off with World War II veteran George Vasil raising the American flag as award-winning vocalist Beth Amodeo sings “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Father Charles Borowski will give the invocation, followed by a moment of silence for departed veterans and a rendition of “Taps” from the Southbridge Police Department Color Guard.

Skonieczny will give a brief history of the Honor Roll project, followed by a selection from singer Mike Garceau.

State Sen. Richard T. Moore, D-Uxbridge, and Rep. Mark J. Carron, D-Southbridge, along with former American Legion Commander Dominic Licastro and project design consultant Bill Muir will give speeches. The Honor Roll Committee will then present the monument site to Town Manager Clayton Carlisle so the town can care for and preserve it.

Borowski will offer a closing prayer, then Southbridge High School Choral and Drama Director Becky Bussiere will lead the audience in a rendition of “God Bless America.”

Organizers expect the ceremony to run about 45 minutes.

A buffet lunch for approximately 125 people who donated the most money for the monument will be held after the dedication.

According to Skonieczny, 551 people donated more than \$82,000 toward the monument, with approximately 50 giving at least \$500. The Honor Roll Committee sent out invitations to the 100 most generous donors for the buffet, he said.

History of the Honor Roll

For the past two years, the Honor Roll Committee has worked to compile the most comprehensive listing ever of Southbridge residents who served in the Armed Forces from World War I to the present. The list contains 4,225 names, Skonieczny said.

The Honor Roll has two empty spaces that can hold an additional 130 names — in case somebody comes forward in the future and proves that he or she should be included, Skonieczny said.

The Veterans' Honor Roll replaces a monument to World War II that crumbled to the ground several years after it was constructed.

The monument expanded from honoring only World War II veterans to include Southbridge residents who served in any conflict since World War I and in peacetime.

“We tried to be thorough,” Skonieczny said.

The monument weighs over 10,000 pounds and has a net value of \$110,000. The main solid granite monument is 10 1/3 feet long by 6.5 feet tall. All 2,400 World War II veterans' names are listed alphabetically on the front and back façade of the main granite block. There are also two side granite monuments as well. Sized at 5 1/3 feet tall by 3 feet wide, approximately 840 World War I, 375 Vietnam, 250 Korean, 100 peacetime, and dozens of Afghanistan, Iraq, and other military conflict veterans are listed. The 30 bronze plaques that contain the names of all veterans cost \$50,000, Skonieczny said.

"We would honor all of them with a bronze plaque, which would be a lifetime [tribute] ... so nobody would forget all of the veterans who serve," he said.

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Honor Roll Monument is the 18 fiber-optic lights that will illuminate it at night and make it "even more gorgeous," Skonieczny said. Southbridge-based Fused Fiberoptics donated the lights. As far as he knew, Skonieczny said, the monument is the only one in the state that has fiber-optic lights.

There will also be sensor-activated lights around the flagpole at Dresser Park to make sure the American flag is always lit at night and never violates flag etiquette.

Once it is handed over to the town, the Honor Roll Committee and the Department of Public Works will come up with a plan to install 10 parking spaces near the monument.

Skonieczny is expecting the memorial to draw quite a crowd, both on Saturday and in the future.

"It's going to bring people in from across the country because it's unique," he said.

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