

'It's Important to the Families'

Hometown Heroes program honors New York veterans

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A VFW Life member in New York was inspired to start a program honoring local veterans and military members during a trip with his wife in the Catskills Mountains.

"We were driving through Cairo (New York) and saw banners with service members on them," retired Army 1st Sgt. Bill Forte said. "My wife (Doris) and I pulled over to look at them, and I thought it was a good idea to do it in our area."

Forte, a Life member of VFW Post 1386 in Kingston, New York, contacted Cairo's historical society and received information on where to get banners made. Soon after, Forte began working with Rileighs Outdoor Decor in Allentown, Pennsylvania. That is when the Hometown Heroes Banner Program was born.

Forte, the project coordinator for the Hometown Heroes program, said that he thought the program would do about 50 banners during its first year in 2015.

"We did 309," said Forte, who served in Granada and Operation Desert Storm. "We had to have a waiting list. The second time we did 300. We plan on doing it again this summer."

Forte said banners of veterans and military members, including those who died in combat, will be displayed in the city on Veterans Day. He also said that those who were killed in action were paid for by the program.

"This program is important to the families of those who served," Forte said. "It gives them a chance to honor deceased and living family members."

Forte said he encourages VFW members to reach out to him if they have any questions about the program.

"We get tons of referral in this business," said Brian Arnold, a Navy veteran and vice president of sales of the Hometown Heroes Banner Program. "Someone will see banners,

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like the idea and start wondering: “How does this work? How can I get started?

“We always recommend to volunteers that they work closely with their local Posts.”

VFW members interested in Hometown Heroes can visit hometownheroesbanners.com.