

VFW Posts Honor Hometown Heroes

Four new and ongoing local memorials were unveiled in 2023 to recognize veterans and their families around their communities

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For nearly 125 years since its inception, one of VFW's priorities has always been the remembrance of veterans who died fighting for their country.

As the oldest combat veterans organization in the nation, VFW's efforts to commemorate the sacrifices of these veterans have led to war memorials sprouting across the country, from small towns to large metropolitan cities.

Commemorated through an array of permanent markers that include monoliths, cemeteries, streets and memorial parks bearing their names, honoring veterans has always been a tenet of VFW's existence.

Here are a few examples of memorials created in 2023 through the help of local VFW Posts, whose memorials honor those who fought to protect and preserve the existence of the nation's values.

'I HOPE WE CAN SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE'

What began as an idea in June 2022 culminated in the first Vietnam War Veterans Monument in Oakland, Ill.

Donated by VFW Post 3637 members to honor all local Vietnam War veterans, the large granite monument was unveiled at Oakland's town square on May 27 to a large crowd that attracted local and state dignitaries to the town of 900 residents.

Engraved on it are the names of 147 Vietnam War veterans, which include three local women and Pfc. Donnie Joe Clough, who was killed in action on Sept. 9, 1969. A rifleman with F Co., 2nd Bn., 5th Marine Regt., 1st Marine Div., Clough is also the namesake of Memorial Highway 133, which runs 52 miles from east to west in Illinois.

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“I hope we can serve as an example for other small towns to honor their veterans,” Post 3637 Service Officer Jim Taber said. “As we all know, the Vietnam veterans did not come home to flag-waving parades, etc. This is our way of honoring them forever.”

JERRY TAYLOR VETERANS PLAZA

The Jerry Taylor Veterans Plaza in Sunnyside, Wash., has blossomed into one of the largest memorials for veterans in the Northwest since its first two walls were installed in 2014.

Spearheaded by past VFW Post 3482 Commander Greg Schlieve, the Jerry Taylor Veterans Plaza is now halfway complete, with 22 of its projected 42 granite walls installed, each engraved with plaques of veterans from the northwest part of the country.

“It is very important to us that individual soldiers be recognized for their service to our country,” said Schlieve, a Vietnam War veteran who deployed in 1969 with C Co., 5th Bn., 7th Cav., 1st Cav. Div.

Schlieve, who overlooks the project, added that the goal is to install two walls every year to honor more and more veterans. Each year, he collects orders from local veterans and families who want to order plaques for themselves or their loved ones.

Each year, the new walls are unveiled in a special ceremony that Schlieve, along with Post 3482 and his Legion Post 73, coordinate and run alongside the town of Sunnyside for those in attendance.

“Our Post’s Honor Guard is there, and we ring the bell as names are read off at the end of the ceremony, along with the wife of one of our members’ wives who played “Taps” for us,” Schlieve said. “It is a special ceremony.”

VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL WALL

During its Veterans Day parade last November, the city of Murrieta, Calif., unveiled the latest installment to its growing Veterans Memorial at Town Square Park.

“It joins our World War II and Korean War monuments, which are all done in black granite with photographic imagery specifically chosen by teams of veterans who served in each of these wars,” said

Bob DeCubellis, a member of VFW Post 4089 in nearby Temecula, Calif.

THE GOLD STAR FAMILY MEMORIAL MONUMENT

Many local and Georgia Gold Star families served as honorary guests at the Veterans Park in Bremen, Ga., for the unveiling of the Gold Star Family Memorial Monument.

In conjunction with Vietnam War Veterans Day on March 29, 2023, the unveiling ceremony welcomed VFW Post 7402 members from Bremen and other state and local dignitaries for

the unveiling of the first monument of its kind in the state.

“This was a Woody Williams Foundation Gold Star Family Monument, which our Post helped fund,” said Kenneth Koch, a VFW Post 7402 member.

“At the ceremony, retired Col. Wayne Waddell, a POW in North Vietnam for five years and eight months, was a keynote speaker at the ceremony.”

This article is featured in the 2024 May issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.