



To honor those who have sacrificed for us all

An Open Letter to the Community

By Tony Hake, Chairman, Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation

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What an incredible Independence Day celebration the City of Thornton had this year! Not only did the city provide its usual first-class celebration on the 4th of July, but it also played host to the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall (the “Wall”). It has been more than a month since the event but it is still so fresh in my mind.

The Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation (TVMF) embarked on a mission to bring the “Wall” to the City of Thornton over six months ago. What started as a casual suggestion by one of the TVMF members quickly grew into an entire weekend of events spanning five days, all surrounding the Wall. The morning of July 3, 2008 started with the rumble of motorcycles and classic military vehicles as over 250 of them escorted the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall to the Thornton Multipurpose Fields near 108th and Colorado Boulevard. Dozens of volunteers helped assemble the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall and transformed a corner of the park into hallowed ground devoted to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to this nation.

A benefit dinner, opening and closing ceremonies, patriotic music performances, a flag retirement ceremony and much more helped to truly make the July 4th weekend unlike any the City of Thornton has ever seen. All of this of course was done in the shadow of the “Wall”. Bearing the names of over 58,000 men and women, The Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall pays homage to the brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who gave the last full measure of devotion to the United States of America.

Thousands of Adams County and Denver Metropolitan, Colorado and surrounding state area residents visited the Wall during its visit to Thornton. As I sit here looking at some of the visitors log entries, I can truly see just how this event has served to touch not only veterans, but all patriotic Americans in the area. Many of the comments visitors left bring a tear to your eye as do some of the special items visitors left at the Wall in memory of their friends, brothers, sisters, children and grandparents whose names are on the Wall. A can of peaches, a book dedicated to a brother whose name is on the “Wall”, a graduation announcement from a young man who never knew his grandfather, POW/MIA bracelets, a six pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon and hundreds of notes are just some of the items left behind. All serve as a testament to the meaning of sacrifice and service for these people and their families.

So many things happened to ensure the success of the Wall event and the thanks are too numerous to mention here. Just a few would include the members of the Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation – all volunteers dedicated to funding and construction of a veterans memorial in our fine city. The Thornton City Council for their ongoing support and the city staff

who devoted many hours of hard work to get ready for the event and over the weekend itself. The corporate and organizational sponsors like Thornton's own Pro Chrysler Plymouth Jeep and the Chrysler Foundation, Dodge Signs, the Northglenn American Legion, MetroNorth Newspapers and over 20 more sponsors who helped fund the event not for promotional purposes but because they too want to ensure veterans are properly recognized. Last but not least, we must thank over 300 people who volunteered hundreds of hours over the weekend to help at the event.

The weekend was a tremendous success for the Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation and our efforts to build a veterans memorial in Thornton. For five days we had the attention of the entire Denver Metropolitan area and we raised over \$25,000 toward the construction of the Thornton Veterans Memorial.

But, this is only the start, a kickoff of our efforts and the beginning of a long process of raising funds, and building, to make the Thornton Veterans Memorial a reality. The appearance of the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall serves as a reminder of just how important the Thornton Veterans Memorial will be and the healing and learning that will happen because of it. These memorials serve to honor our veterans and are but a small token of our appreciation for the sacrifices these brave men and women have made.

From the Revolutionary War to Operation Iraqi Freedom, from Concord to Kabul, whether war time or peace, millions of men and women have stepped forth to ensure this nation and other nations remain free. These men and women have paid a high price for our freedom, selflessly sacrificing life or limb for an honorable cause, and these are the people the Thornton Veterans Memorial will honor.

It is with all of this in mind that the Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation issues a "call to arms." We have been working for the last three years to make the memorial a reality. Now is the time for the entire Denver metropolitan community to step forward and help us.

As we move forward with plans for the Thornton Veterans Memorial, we ask that you help us by donating all that you can towards building the Memorial. We need every part of the community to participate to help us obtain this goal. Estimates show the Memorial will cost \$800,000 to build and with rising construction costs, that number is growing. Currently, we have less than \$50,000 in funds to build the Memorial. We need area business, civic organizations, citizens, foundations, trusts and government organizations all to step-up and make contributions to help make the Thornton Veterans Memorial a reality.

Some of the ways of giving are private cash donations made directly to the Thornton Veterans Memorial Website at www.thorntonveteransmemorial.org, or by purchasing an engraved paver brick that will form the walkways within the Memorial. Other types of giving include gifting grants, holding a fundraiser for the Memorial, and/or giving a donation to the TVMF Endowment Fund. All donations are tax deductible, as the Thornton Veterans Memorial Foundation is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization, and is staffed fully by volunteers. All donations go directly to support building the Thornton Veterans Memorial.

As the closing ceremony of the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall was completed, and the flags were retired, I was blessed to stand in a place where I know that someday, the City of Thornton will have its own veterans memorial. This can only happen if we all become “watchmen on the wall” and give with the same sacrificial attitude that those who have given their lives for our country. Donating financially is a small way that we can honor those veterans for protecting our national freedom. Building the Thornton Veterans Memorial will represent the honor of our national veteran heroes.

Please give now. You can make contributions, buy paver bricks and learn more about the project on our website at www.thorntonveteransmemorial.org or by calling 303-563-7046. Thank you for your generous support.