

McFarland

## Mural ensures fallen soldiers will not be forgotten

By Kendra Lamer klamer@hngnews.com

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The Wall of Fallen Heroes commemorates local soldiers who have lost their lives. Commemorated on the mural are Henry J. Kampmeier, Dennis Chamberlin and Joshua Brennan.

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American Legion Post 534 unveiled the Wall of Fallen Heroes to keep the stories and sacrifices of servicemen and women alive.



The mural features the plaques of five local servicemen who were killed overseas. Plaques with the photos, names and information of Cpl. Alvin Edwards, PFC Steven A. Foye, PFC Henry J. Kampmeier, Specialist Fourth Grade Dennis Chamberlin and Sgt. Joshua Brennan are commemorated on the mural.

Professional airbrush artist Mark Kerttula created the mural with multiple layers of paint, a process that took five to six weeks. Kerttula creates art for motorcycles, including a piece to memorialize one of the soldiers on the mural.



The mural shows an American flag with one star containing the Purple Heart. On the left side is a battlefield memorial of a rifle laying between boots with a soldier's helmet on top. To the right is an angel carrying a fallen soldier toward the heavens as a symbol of relief.

Michael Shumway wanted to create the mural as a way for the American Legion to honor local veterans who have fallen with the support of former Commander Bill Bley.

Post members and businesses donated to the project.

The Slattery and Damon families donated \$4,000 from the 7th annual Bags for Buds event in memory of Brandon Slattery and Amy Damon, who died as a result of an accident on New Year's Day in 2013.

The engaged couple enjoyed picnics and being with friends, so their friends wanted to commemorate their lives in a way they would have enjoyed.

The memorial corn hole tournament has raised a total of about \$20,000 for local organizations since its start seven years ago.



“We don’t ever want anybody to forget Amy and Brandon either,” Tammy Damon said.

Bags for Buds raises money with a \$15 per person registration fee and raffles. American Legion Post 534 donated meat for this year’s meat raffle.

Remaining funds from the donation have been placed into Post 534’s veterans assistance fund for veterans, spouses and their families.

When a soldier is killed, their story may be prevalent in the community but can fade from memory as time passes.

“With a physical presence like this where you have images that evoke a feeling in you when you look at a mural and see these faces on the wall, you can’t help but be reminded of those people that came before us, who served in combat and who died in war,” Shumway said.

“Be it if they died 100 years ago or 12 years ago, they’re still a member of this community, and it’s only fitting that an institution like the American Legion continues to shine that light on these people.”

About 40 American Legion Post 534 members, family members of the fallen servicemen and community members gathered for the dedication ceremony.

In attendance were two of Kampmeier’s sisters. Kampmeier was killed March 2, 1945, while serving in World War II. One of his sisters wore a gold cross necklace to the ceremony. When her brother’s remains were returned from overseas, there was a box with her name on it. Her brother had gotten the cross as a gift to send her.

The women shared photos and stories about their brother.

“Now these two ladies who are now in their 90s realize that all of these years later that their brother and his service and his sacrifice are not forgotten,” Mike Brennan said.

Brennan’s son, Joshua Brennan, was killed in Afghanistan on Oct. 25, 2007.

Joshua Brennan was shot nine times in the leg a month before his death. The Taliban stripped him of his helmet, rifle and backpack as they tried to capture him.

His friend ran to save him, shooting and killing the Taliban. He went on to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first living recipient of the medal in more than 40 years.

Joshua Brennan led the group as the point man back to base camp despite his injuries.

“It’s for all of our fallen and for their families so that we will never forget,” Mike Brennan said about the mural. “Those aren’t just hollow words, but we will never forget.”

One of Mike Brennan’s nephews was inspired to join the service after Josh Brennan was killed. He enlisted and became a paratrooper in the same unit as Josh Brennan. Like Josh, he was deployed to Afghanistan.

Mike Brennan is also an Army veteran and his daughter, Brittany Brennan, is actively serving in the Army military police in Hawaii. His father served during the Korean War and another one of his nephews was a crew chief for the Black Hawk helicopter in Madison.

“Another hundred years from now, people will look at that wall and they remember their service and the sacrifice, and we won’t have to retell their stories,” Mike Brennan said. “It will be there and people will know about them.”



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Kendra Lamer

