



‘Silent recognition’



BILL BENGTON/STAFF

Aiken-area veterans and well-wishers are on hand for pictures at a July 3 assembly for the naming of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge, on US 1, near Gun Range Road. The bridge dates back to 1982 and is on tap to be replaced within the next four years.

Aiken-area veterans, advocates unveil highway marker on U.S. 1

BY BILL BENGTSON
bbengtson@aikenstandard.com

AIKEN — Local veterans got a salute on the eve of Independence Day, via a gathering on US 1, on the northern edge of Aiken, with the unveiling of two highway signs designating Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge.

The focus was on “your service to your nation,” in the words of Rep. Bill Taylor, R-Aiken, who helped bring the idea to fruition and spoke at the July 3 gathering a few yards from the highway and about 100 yards uphill from the bridge.

"Thousands of drivers ... will pass by this every single day, every month, for years and years and years to come, and so I hope this marker ... serves as a reminder to them, as they drive by. It's a reminder of the time of the '60s and '70s, before most of them were ever born," he said.

"Maybe those will want to know just a little bit about this when they see these signs. They'll want to know about the Vietnam War and the sacrifice our servicemen and service-

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women gave.”

The bridge, which runs over Shaws Creek, near Gun Range Road and Aiken's water-treatment plant, dates back to 1982 and is on track to be replaced during the next four years. It is about 50 yards long and a newly unveiled sign is up on each side of the bridge.

Marine Corps veteran Jay Reynolds, treasurer of S.C. Vietnam Veterans of America's

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A new marker is now in place on US 1, on Aiken's northern edge, in honor of Vietnam veterans. A gathering marking the naming of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge, near Gun Range Road, was held July 3.

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State Council spoke at the gathering. He acknowledged contributions from Taylor and Sen. Tom Young, R-Aiken, among others, in helping bring the marker project to fruition.

Reynolds added, "Most people don't realize what war is about until they've lost comrades. We came from varied backgrounds. We were draftees. We were volunteers. We had stories of hope, gratitude and resilience. Many of us still carry the weight of war."

The signs may "provide a sense of reflection healing, and perhaps a sense of peace," Reynolds said. "What we did mattered."

Reynolds, acknowledging that many Vietnam veterans are "somewhat leery about speaking about their experiences," suggested later that the markers will serve as "a symbol of silent recognition."

Lowell Koppert, chairman of Aiken County Veterans Council, helped guide the project and organize the event, and noted that Reynolds is an avid bicyclist. Reynolds confirmed being familiar with a variety of roadside features around the county through rides from his home, near Herndon Dairy Road, near the s

of a Storm Branch Road bridge that is currently closed and on track for replacement.

Air Force Veteran Dick Chelchowski described the July 3 event as "a nice, respectful ceremony," and also recalled the memory of his dad, the late Walter Chelchowski.

"My dad and I were in Vietnam the same year, and he was a World War II veteran, and he had discharges from the Navy, Army and Air Force. It's a shame that he couldn't be there, because he loved the military."



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