

## Community Happenings

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# Community Gathers for Bernards Township Memorial Day Parade



**By Andrew McCabe**

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**LIBERTY CORNER, NJ** - On Monday morning, towns and cities across the country took to the streets for their annual Memorial Day parades and celebrations, and Basking Ridge, NJ, was no different. Beginning at 9:30 AM, the Ridge High School Marching Band led the stream of parade participants out of the Liberty Corner Firehouse and down Church Street.

The band, followed closely by the Liberty Corner Fire Company and Basking Ridge Fire Company No. 1 and EMS, serenaded the many spectators lining the sidewalks and lawns of downtown Liberty Corner. As representatives from various community organizations marched along the parade route, passing out candy and American flags, a crowd began to form around the flagpole, intersecting Church Street, Valley Road, and Lyons Road.

The ceremony commenced with Rabbi Mendel Shemtov, a member of Chabad of Somerset County, delivering the invocation.

"Their [fallen soldiers'] bravery and sacrifice inspire us all, citizens and service members alike, to strive for a nation grounded in justice, truth, and peace," Rabbi Shemtov said.

"In the merit of our resolve and in honor and enamor of the heroism we commemorate today, may God Almighty bless this sacred gathering, bless our men and women in uniform, and bless our great nation, the United States of America," Rabbi Shemtov concluded.

Ken White, Chief of the Liberty Corner Fire Company, continued the ceremony with a brief history of Memorial Day to provide context as to why the continued gatherings and remembrances began. Subsequently, Chief White addressed the crowd with solemn reminders of the day's significance.

"The freedom that we enjoy each day comes from the sacrifice that the members of our military have made to protect us as a nation... Today, we should all take the time, before we continue to enjoy our freedom, to reflect and remember those who have helped to ensure that our freedom is here for us to enjoy... Please keep all veterans, their families, and those whom we've lost in your thoughts and prayers today," White said.

Chief White then introduced the keynote speaker of the event, Mayor of Bernards Township, Janice Fields.

"Living here in Bernards, it's easy to overlook the deep history that surrounds us. It's easy to forget how closely tied our town is to the founding of the United States, and that the very ground we walk on was once a battlefield. Our peaceful town was once on the front lines of a fight for freedom," Fields said.

Chartered in 1760, Bernards Township has seen and been involved in almost all of American history, most notably the Revolutionary War. It was during this time that a liberty pole was erected in town, and Annin's Corner was renamed Liberty Corner. The pole, a symbol of British disapproval and the independence movement, was likely set up within reach of where Mayor Fields delivered her speech.

Drawing a connection between the town's legacy and the enduring selflessness of those who have served throughout America's history, Fields reminded the crowd that Memorial Day is not only about the past but also about honoring the countless men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the freedoms we enjoy today.

"They gave their lives in distant lands for people that never knew them, and for all of us here today. We are the beneficiaries of the courage of their sacrifice. This morning's ceremony is somber because it reflects a profound loss, the cost of defending our nation. But what follows today, whether it's a cookout, a trip to the beach, or simply time with loved ones, should be a celebration of the very freedoms they died to protect," she said.

Chief White then invited the several community organizations in attendance to present their symbols of remembrance at the World War I and World War II memorial within the Church Street median.

As “Taps” rang out from the marching band’s instruments, and the war memorial sat bathed in red, white, and blue flowers, the American flag was raised to half-staff. A powerful moment of acknowledgment lingered in the air as this year’s Memorial Day ceremony in Basking Ridge came to a close.