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Nonprofit lauds local businesses' support and generosity

By Evelyn Candor@publius.publications.com 10:36 p.m. October 28, 2016

NEW JERSEY – It wasn't by happenstance that the All Veterans Memorial main ceremonial complex took on the footprint of the Congressional Medal of Honor; it was the uncanny parallel of five separate designs submitted by respected hardscape professionals and one architect. After receiving five independent renderings, the memorial committee turned to local architect Glenn Pellet to refine them into one final design. Once the footprint was established, they all agreed that nothing would change or impede the original design in any way, shape or form.

Over the years however, the escalating misuse of the memorial would eventually bring the AVM development team back to the table for further evaluation. The memorial runs parallel with a popular walking path that attracts walkers, bicyclist and skateboarders. Many find it more convenient to take a shortcut through the memorial ground rather than use the paved walkway leading from the parking lot to the walking path. "It's a matter of respect. It's very disappointing to see adults leading their young children right pass the sign that reads, 'No Bicycles, No Skateboards allowed on the memorial' as they ride through the memorial. We are having to re-glue blocks and reset pavers, clean bicycle skid marks and mud tracks because people don't want to use the path", AVM Board of Director Linda Sohl added. "It's been a challenge."

How does one turn a challenge into an opportunity? "We're building a wall", explained AVM Originator Charlie Uhrmann. "Not just any wall, a wall that'll remind us all of the inalienable rights so many of our brave men and women have died for to protect. The wall will make an excellent addition to the memorial and best of all; it will not change the memorial's footprint." The impressive 4.5' x 55' wall will display ten 20" x 20" tablets that will don the first ten Amendments of the Bill of Rights that were ratified by our Founding Fathers on December 15, 1791. The display will also include a 24' x 24' tablet donning the Congrefs. Two realistic 4' tall American Eagles will be placed at each end of the wall.

At the beginning of August, a preliminary sketch of the wall was presented to Karl Meier, owner of Meier Stone Company in Flanders, N.J. It took very little time for Meier to begin reaching out to several of his customers and vendors seeking support; by the end of the month the project was in full swing. "It is for a great cause and good for the community. It is my pleasure to help out", Meier said.

Meier is certainly no stranger to the veteran's memorial park. His involvement and generosity began more than ten years ago, during the first phase of the project. More recently, Karl worked side by side with Uhrmann during the construction of the North Star Seating area and War Dog Memorial. "It was great having someone like Karl to turn to when we hit technical snags. It was very educational watching him apply old world techniques; hand cutting the large bolder that is now the War Dog Memorial sign. It was amazing to watch him niche away tiny pieces of rock until he reached perfection. One mistake and it's all over. Tedious work like that takes a lot of patience and strength. At one point, Karl attracted quite an audience. Not many people possess those skillsets today. We were fortunate to experience that," Uhrmann explained.

Meier's network of professionals proves to be invaluable to the project. The camaraderie and support of the Freedom Wall displayed a sense of pride and patriotism. By September 1st, Meier, along with Vince Iacampo of Iacampo Pools & Spa prepared a 60' wide and 6' deep framed rebar footing for the massive wall. Meier called upon Randy & Wayne Haggerty of New Age Masonry to assist in the actual pouring of the concrete. It took less than a week for the second phase to be completed and inspected. Once the footing was complete, Meier called upon another colleague, Orlando Almeida of Lusitana Liberty Construction to prepare the site for the massive 4.5' x 55' wall, by setting up large forms sturdy enough to support the massive weight of the concrete. "Orlando and his crew were very generous and kind to us. It was strange, when they thanked us for

allowing them to be a part of this project. We don't often hear that", Uhrmann said.

SURPRISE VISIT

During the final pour of concrete, Frank Hunkele owner of Diamond Sand & Gravel also known as Sparta Redi-Mix paid his crew and Uhrmann a surprise visit at the memorial. The memorial grounds looked very different since last time Hunkele visited. His last visit was on September 11, 2006 when his company donated all the concrete for the first phase of the memorial. "Before we could get started with phase one of the memorial, the Historical Society was given the responsibility by the township to relocate the Mount Olive War Memorial from the beach to the center of the AVM. The historical granite monument required a secure base. Without hesitation, Councilman Mania and Mr. Hunkele jumped right in and donated all the concrete for the first phase of the project", Uhrmann explained. It would be more than a decade before Uhrmann and Hunkele would meet again. "I was very surprised and happy to see him and offered to give him a tour. After the tour, Frank expressed how impressed he was and how proud it made him feel to be involved. Moments later, he took the invoice from my hand and said; consider the concrete our donation to your efforts and worthy cause. I was absolutely speechless", Uhrmann recalled.

Immediately upon the completion of the concrete work, Karl began constructing the two large columns on each side of the wall. The materials for the columns were donated by Techo-Bloc. "We were shocked to learn that Karl was able to get Techo-Bloc to donate all the materials for the piers. It saved us an immense amount of money; money we can now apply towards our homeless veteran outreach program during the up and coming winter months", Uhrmann said.

The magnificent wall now awaits the final stage; the placement of the ten amendment tablets and the two American eagles. The installation and completion of the Freedom Wall is schedule to take place sometime at the end of February.