

Mt. Olive group plans Memorial Day event after Mayor cancels parade

Michael Izzo, Staff Writer @GannettNJ.com 3:11 p.m. ET May 21, 2015 edited

MOUNT OLIVE – This Memorial Day will be the first in the township in more than three decades to not have a parade, but that doesn't mean there won't be a special event to mark the holiday.

“The parade maybe gone, but we are not cancelling a ceremony to honor our fallen. We have a very special program planned”, said Charlie Uhrmann, originator of the All Veterans Memorial, which constructed the veterans memorial at Turkey Brook Park.

For the past 30 years, the parade was coordinated by Bill and Linda Sohl, a Mount Olive couple who announced their retirement from parade-planning after last year's event.

Linda Sohl said they did not know the parade would stop running once they retired. “We knew we could count on Charlie to handle the ceremony”, she said, “And thought the town would pick up the parade.”

But the Mount Olive Administration announced earlier this year that a Food Truck Festival would replace the Memorial Day events. “He didn't speak to anyone before making his decision, we read about it in the newspaper.” Uhrmann said. “Mayor Rob Greenbaum said there would be a township parade after the Sohls retired, but then replaced it with food trucks and fireworks? I find that is totally un-patriotic and inappropriate.”

Greenbaum said Memorial Day events will now be organized by the All Veterans Memorial group.

“The All Veterans Committee graciously took over the events being planned for Memorial Day, “Greenbaum said. “I hope the weather is sunny and there is a large turnout honoring those who have given their lives to protect us and our way of life.”

Greenbaum did not comment on why the township chose to move on from the parade, but insisted that the All Veterans group was welcome to host a parade if they wished to do so. “The AVM committee was free to run all festivities they thought were appropriate,” Greenbaum said. “The Township appreciates their volunteerism and commitment.”

Uhrmann said Memorial Day is one of the most important holidays in the country. “Memorial Day is not about entertaining a crowd or gaining popularity; but rather recognizing the tremendous sacrifice of our veterans and their families. Freedom is the bedrock of our nation. Freedom is certainly not free and I believe it is our patriotic duty to recognize that fact on that one particular day” Uhrmann said. “The concern was that the Mayor arbitrarily canceled a thirty year tradition.”

Parade or no parade, the Sohls and Uhrmann are happy there will be a Memorial Day event in Mount Olive. “I am satisfied there is still a ceremony,” Linda Sohl said.

Funding for the Memorial Day event will not come from the township. “This is one day where we can and should show our appreciation for what we have. It is sad to see so many people believing this day marks the first day of summer or just an extra day off to barbeque with their family and friends, while so many spend that day in mourning” Uhrmann said.

The Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony begins at 9:30 a.m. Monday with “Patriots in the Park” which will feature educational guided tours, displays, performances and dedications at the All Veterans Memorial at Turkey Brook Park in Mount Olive Township.

At 11:15 a.m., there will be a military processional march around the park, featuring the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Color Guard, Mt. Olive High School Marching Band and re-enactors.

The North Star Seating Area dedication hosted by Gail Williams, Manager of Hackettstown Home Depot will begin at 11:30 a.m. More than 11 Gold Star Mothers will be present for the dedication.

Lt. General Gus Perna, featured Keynote Speaker will deliver a special message to the families who lost a loved one in the Middle East. The laying of the memorial flowers and special dance performance by Theater Dance will immediately follow. Special guest performances by the NJ Pipes & Drum of the Blue and Gold, Mount Olive Middle School Chorus, the Mount Olive High School Percussion and Boy Scout Troop 249 is scheduled.

“I know people are upset the parade is gone, but the ceremony is the most important part,” Linda Sohl said. “We come from an extensive military background and this has always been about the men and women who serve and pay the ultimate sacrifice.”

Greenbaum said the Food Truck and Fireworks Festival was pushed to Labor Day because the forecast called for bad weather. “Trust us when we say, no one is more bummed than us” Greenbaum said on his Facebook page.