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Fallen influence new VFW Post 6654 memorial Formal dedication to be Nov. 14

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The new memorial in front of De Soto VFW Post 6654 gives the nation's war dead a chance to exercise the "fifth freedom," Post Commander Drew Culbertson says.

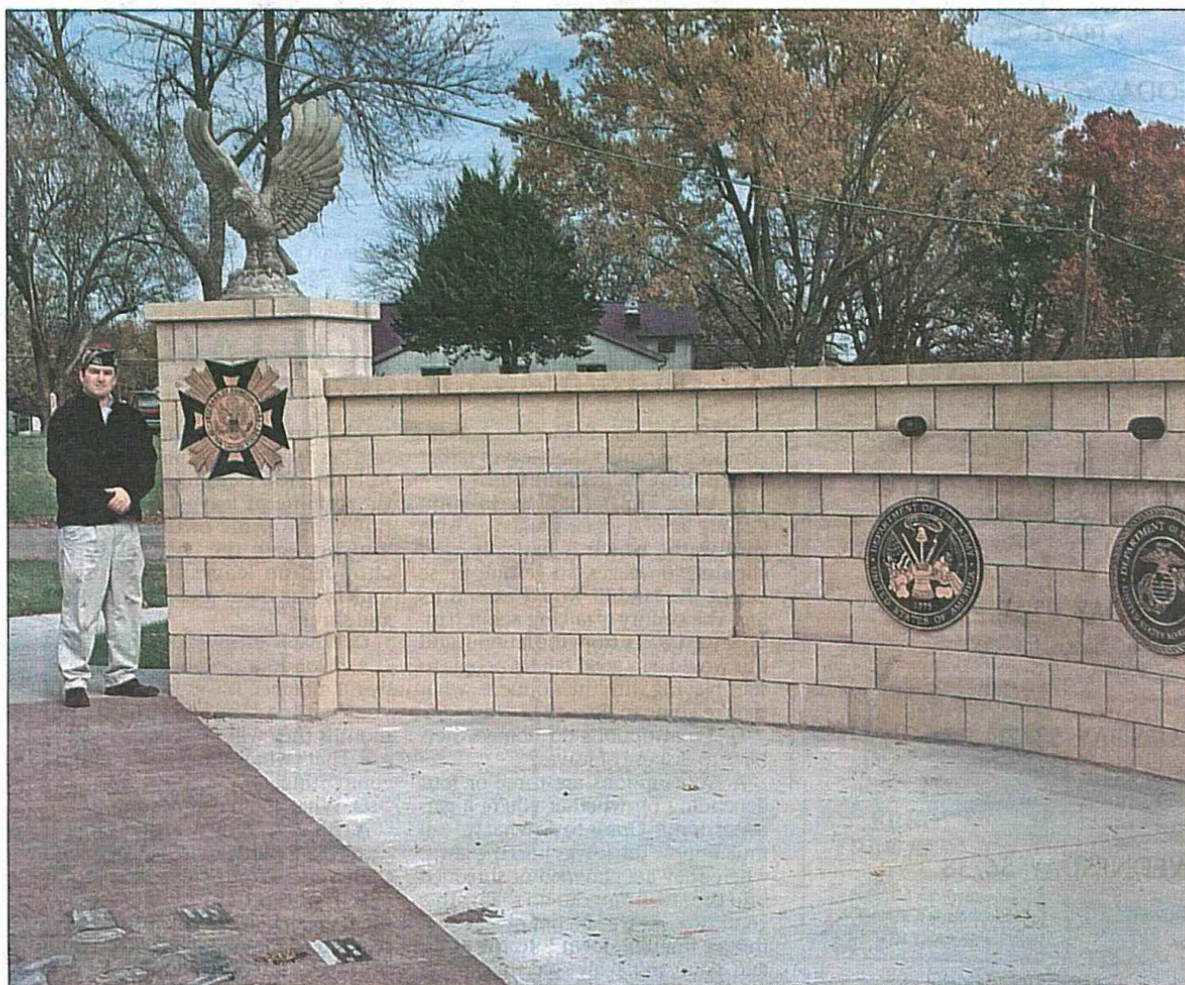
The four freedoms President Franklin Roosevelt famously espoused in the war torn year of 1941 were the freedoms of speech, religion, want and fear. Culbertson added another to that list.

"That's the freedom to influence," he said. "Those guys and gals who didn't come back home didn't get to have that freedom."

On Nov. 14 in association with Veterans Day, the De Soto VFW Post will dedicate a memorial that Culbertson said will not only honor all veterans but give those who gave their lives for their country a chance to influence others.

Among the details of the memorial are plaques and markers in its interior. One reads: "All gave some; some gave all." Granite markers denote the eight wars that veterans who have joined the VFW through the years — the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, Iraq War and the current war in Afghanistan — and lists the number of killed and wounded in those wars.

"It's a visual reminder to those who don't think about the freedoms we



ELVYN J. JONES/STAFF

De Soto VFW Post 6654 Commander Drew Culbertson stands at the end of the 32-foot sidewalk the bisects the new memorial in front of the post. The markers in the center denote the eight wars fought by past and present members of the VFW and list the number of dead and casualties in the wars. The memorial will be dedicated with ceremonies Nov. 14.

Community rallied to VFW memorial

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have," Culbertson said. "It's a cliché, but it's really true: Freedom is not free. It was won with a lot of sacrifice of life, blood and just the sacrifice of being away from family."

In the past year, De Soto residents have watched as the elliptical memorial started to emerge from its concrete base. White stone masonry has been added to the facade, three spun aluminum flagpoles raised from its rear perimeter, brass insignia of U.S. Armed Forces branches installed on the inner wall, two eagles placed on book-end pillars, and lettering added to the front.

All this cost an estimated \$100,000, Cul-

bertson said. But that total includes a good deal of volunteer time and materials. Culbertson has a long list of post and community members who contributed either through labor, money or materials, but he said two contributors stood out.

"This project wouldn't have been possible without Monte Freeman of Freeman Concrete Company and Charlie James of Miller Paving," he said.

The push in the past year ended a project first conceived more than a decade ago. It started moving from a long-range to-do list when earlier this decade the post acquired and razed the two houses, one donated by a post member, along Penner Avenue in front of the post, Culbertson said.

In 2003, post member Herb Wood created a watercolor sketch of the memorial that now hangs on a post wall.

Wood's sketch remained the inspiration throughout the next six years, Culbertson said. Blueprints or schematics were never drawn up, he said.

"It was a good sketch," he said. "I think a lot of us are pleasantly surprised with how it evolved. Herb will tell you he didn't envision it would be as big as it is."

But the sketch and a brick-sale fundraising campaign were pretty much where Culbertson found the project when he first became post commander three years ago.

"I knew there were people who had already bought the bricks," he said. "I just took it as a mandate."

For the last two years, the push has been aided by post member Archie Bedford. A former Seabee and construction engineer who saw duty in Korea, Bedford put his background to work on the project.

"Recently, he's really been keeping this thing moving," Culbertson said. "The joke is, 'What is he going to do now?'"

Bedford said his retirement allowed him to spend time on the memorial. But like Culbertson, he preferred to talk of the long list of post members, De Soto residents and businesses who helped with different aspects of the memorials, such as Randy Canaan who welded the flagpole fixtures to what were aluminum light poles.

Volunteer help and brick sales picked up in recent months as people started to see progress on the memorial, Bedford said.

With its completion, the memorial will be home to future VFW ceremonies, starting — for 2010 at least — with the post's Memorial Day ceremony. But Culbertson hopes it will also be the site of quiet moments for the 300 individuals and families who have already bought bricks, veterans remembering their time in the service or those with departed loved ones who served in the nation's wars.

"I would hope families come to remember fathers and sons and reflect when they see those numbers, and remember what it's all about."

Full slate of activities to mark memorial's dedication

It won't be on the holiday, but the De Soto VFW 6654 will mark Veteran's Day with the formal dedication Nov. 14 of its new memorial facing Penner Avenue.

Post Commander Drew Culbertson said the activities will start at 11 a.m. with a De Soto Boy Scout Troop 54 flag burning ceremony. The dedication itself will start at noon.

The dedication will include an outside ceremony, followed by indoor activities. It will last from about noon to 3 p.m., Culbertson said.

The opening outdoor ceremony will include a performance of "Taps" by Post Quartermaster Dave Cuba, the presentation of colors and 21-gun salute by the post's color guard and speeches.

Helping with the festivities will be a vehicles from Military Vehicle Preservation Association, a fly-over by the Commemorative Air Force, a parked military helicopter and a color guard from one of the military branches.

"Our color guard will be there, too, but these guys are really slick," he said. "They do this everyday."

Inside activities will include a performance by the Olathe Civic Jazz Band playing music from the 1940s and 1950s, and a steak dinner. Tickets for the dinner are \$15 for adults 15 and older and \$7.50 for those 14 and younger.

In keeping with the music of the band, the meal will be served by three servers in '40s and '50s attire, Culbertson said.