

Holden Kids of Liberty finish veterans memorial Monument ready for May 26 holiday unveiling

By Nok-Noi Ricker
Of the News Staff
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The large memorial stone and benches arrived on Friday and the Kids of Liberty - a new generation of patriots - spent Saturday morning laying out veterans paving stones for the new Holden Veterans Memorial, a project they have worked on for months.

The group of SAD 63 eighth-graders decided to build a memorial to honor military veterans as their service learning-citizenship project after a trip to the Cole Land Transportation Museum in Bangor in September and interviews with veterans about their military experiences.

"The Holden Veterans Memorial began as a student-generated idea and has become a source of community pride and investment in those who have served our country," said Trisha Smith, an eighth-grade language arts teacher, who has run the school's annual service learning project for the past decade.

"We never expected it to come together so quickly, but thanks to generous donations from local contractors, community members and businesses, it will soon become reality."

The monument, which is engraved with the words "Dedicated to all Holden veterans - past, present, future" will be appropriately unveiled on Memorial Day. Two dusk to dawn lights will illuminate the flag and monument stone at night.

"The details are being ironed out for the Memorial Day ribbon-cutting, and I've begun drafting a program," Smith said. "We plan to bus students to the parade, as some will march. [And] we've been invited by Galen Cole to the Cole Museum for their events immediately following the parade." She said the project is a perfect way to connect the students with the community.

The tentative schedule, which "gets bigger and bigger all the time" is to reveal the memorial at 4 p.m. Monday, May 26, Smith said.

The keynote speaker is Clifton resident Lt. Col. Eric Johns. Galen Cole and John Bryant, Holden Town Council chairman, also have been asked to speak and resident Bonnie Clark, who has been instrumental in the process, will be cutting the ribbon.

The U.S. Marine Corps League will present the colors, a gun salute is planned, and taps will be played. The Holden and Eddington elementary school choruses

will sing, and the Holbrook Middle School band will play patriotic music. The event will end with a barbecue hosted by the Holden Fire Auxiliary.

"It will be a very special day for this community, especially the individuals who have invested so much into making this happen - there are many," Smith said.

The project's student leaders are Jamie Muth, Kylie Danforth, Jasmine Coulter, Emily Ellis and Willie Paine, but the momentum of the project has attracted others.

The students sent out letters to residents and held several fundraisers to earn the money for the project, which costs around \$16,050. The response has been tremendous, Smith said.

"That is part of the magic going on," Smith said. "People are coming out of the woodwork, working together, and giving for a good cause. It's like the ripple effect, and that's great for kids to see [and] experience."

During a spaghetti dinner in March, the Kids of Liberty received a \$7,000 donation from the Brewer Wal-Mart Supercenter and a pledge by the Galen Cole Family Foundation to match up to \$10,000.

In addition to that, several businesses and area residents pitched in with materials including flagpoles, flags, and stone and granite for the memorial's base.

Paving stones, with the names of individual veterans, their branch of service and ranks, and the war or conflict in which they served, have been sold to individuals for \$150, which is "at cost" and are still available to order, Smith said.

"We've sold 44 paving stones, and orders continue to come," she said. "We plan to have at least 54 for Memorial Day, to complete one row along each side of the walkway. There will be plenty of room for future growth, as we've planned for a future second row."

The memorial is located near the gazebo by Holden Elementary School. Residents and veterans are invited to attend the 4 p.m. Memorial Day unveiling.

[Please contact the Town of Holden at 843-5151 to order a paving stone.]

nricker@bangordailynews.net
990-8190