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Town of Grand Island Town Memorial Day ceremony held amid pandemic

As Grand Island observed Memorial Day services Monday, it observed social distancing and assembly restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic that limited attendance to the event to a fraction of its usual number.

"This Memorial Day, we come together, even if only in mind and spirit, to honor the many sacrifices paid for our freedom," said keynote speaker Dan McMahon of Grand Island.

Grand Island Town Supervisor John Whitney thanked the DeGlopper VFW Post No. 9249, and the American Legion Post No. 1346 for their help in organizing the event. On May 19, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that groups of no more than 10 could gather to conduct Memorial Day ceremonies. The ceremonies on the Island in recent years have been attended by well into the hundreds.

"It is with great regret that this ceremony must be limited in size due to this insidious COVID-19 virus," Whitney said. "I truly wish we could honor our fallen military in the way they deserve."

The ceremony was taped for view on social media via the town's website and lasted 20 minutes. It took place in the park in the heart of town that is undergoing renovations and improvements.

The guest speaker for the cer-



Above, Town Supervisor John Whitney speaks at the town's Memorial Day ceremony in Deglopper Memorial Park. Right, Joe Synakowski reads the roll of honor of Islanders who died in wartime. Chaplain Joe Mesmer, center, and keynote speaker Dan McMahon are pictured at right.

emony was McMahon, a United States Army veteran who served from 1968 to 1970. While in service, he spent one year in Vietnam, and, during his tour of duty, he received the Combat Infantry Badge, Bronze Star with V Device, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Medal, Civil Action Medal with Oak Leaf, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

McMahon said that "in services across our country today we come together as a nation to remember those lost in the clash of battle, the thunder of bomb, the roar of tanks, the rumbling of airplanes flying overhead, and the scream of artillery shell."

McMahon added, "As we enjoy living in the land of the free and the home of the brave, we must continue to remind Americans there is no freedom without bravery. And those we honor today were brave when it counted most. Amid the war-torn decades

we endured, we take great pride in these heroes, these men and women who believe they were just doing their duty because they had the strength when the situation demanded it, determination when everything else felt lost; devotion, courage and patriotism.

"In cemeteries across America and around the world today, we pause to spread flowers on the graves of those lost in wars. But today should not be about sorrow. We feel they're at their loss and not about mourning, but it should be about what was best expressed by Gen. George S. Patton back in 1944 in a cemetery in France. Looking across the field filled with rows of crosses marking the graves of those who had just days before been part of his army, Patton said we should thank God that such men lived.

"That is what this special day is all about, being thankful that such brave men and women who



have lived and paying tribute to those heroic patriots who bravely rose up and fought for something greater than themselves. Protecting a home to which they never returned, they sacrificed everything for the noblest of causes."

Whitney concluded the ceremony by saying Memorial Day

is the "official start of summer, a day when families gather, have a cookout. But let us not forget the sacrifices given by the men and women of our armed services that allow us to have a gathering on this solemn day. Never forget."

Golden Age Club to receive grant

The Western New York COVID-19 Community Response Fund, announced Thursday that it has awarded nearly \$1 million to an additional 47 nonprofit organizations, bringing the total grant amount from the fund to \$6.6 million, supporting a total of 156 nonprofit organizations.

One of the grants is coming to the Golden Age Club at Grand Is-

land's Golden Age Center in the Nike Base Park.

This collaborative philanthropic effort was created in mid-March in response to the COVID-19 health crisis and has been coordinated by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Health Foundation for Western & Central New York, The John R. Oishei Foundation and the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County.

Grants were awarded to organizations serving all eight counties of Western New York that are addressing immediate needs in the community as a result of the COVID-19 crisis in the areas of food, housing, health care, child care, mental health, transportation, and other emergency services.

This is expected to be the final phase of grantmaking to individual organizations from the WNY COV-

ID-19 Community Response Fund. Additional funds raised will provide microgrants ranging from approximately \$500 - \$2,500 to grassroots organizations in all eight counties. Going forward, the collaborative effort is evolving into a "Build Back Better" initiative to support developing strategies focused on recovery efforts through collaborative systems work to address specific needs such as sourcing personal protective equipment for nonprofits and food security.

"The sudden arrival of the COVID-19 crisis necessitated an immediate response to meet the significant need in the community with everyone working together on solutions. We are grateful that so many foundations, corporations, community leaders and individuals continue to generously contribute time and resources to support

more than 156 organizations to date working on the frontlines at a time of great need," said Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, President/CEO of Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

Robert D. Gioia, president of The John R. Oishei Foundation added, "We are just at the beginning of this crisis and it will take a sustained, collaborative effort to continue to assess critical needs and find new, creative solutions to rebuild our community."

"It's clear that COVID-19 will have a long-term, serious impact on the people and communities of Western New York," said Nora O'Brien-Suric, Ph.D., president of the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York. "We remain committed to supporting nonprofit organizations in our region as they work tirelessly to meet the evolving

needs of the community."

"We are facing unprecedented need and are only just beginning to grapple with the effects caused by COVID-19," said Michael Weiner, president and CEO of the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County. "Extraordinary times call for an extraordinary response and we will continue to support our community and the nonprofits on the ground throughout this unprecedented crisis."

To date, the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund has raised approximately \$7 million from 60 local foundations and private sector companies, more than 40 community leaders and approximately 1,900 individuals. To see a full list of contributors, or to join the effort, please visit www.WNYResponds.org.

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