

## A History of the Orion Veterans Memorial

The Orion Veterans Memorial is a tribute by the Charter Township of Orion to the sacrifices made by the military men and women of Orion and our country.

The Memorial began in 1993 when the Orion Area Chamber of Commerce appointed Dr. Joseph Mastromatteo to spearhead this most worthy cause. Other key people on the committee were the late Joe Zikewich, Bob Watros, and Joe Guinn. Since the very beginning many women, men, and businesses have come together to build what we know today as the Orion Veterans Memorial.

In June of 1994, the 50th anniversary of D-Day, a group of interested citizens met at Children's Park in the Village of Lake Orion and announced their plan to create the Orion Veterans Memorial. A site search for a home for the Memorial was undertaken along with the task of raising funds to start construction.

In 1996 the Charter Township of Orion purchased the corner lot at M-24 and Odanah Street giving the Memorial a home. A Memorial Board of Directors was established. The adjacent lot was purchased 2 years later making the memorial as it stands today.

The construction consisted of several phases over 20 years. Each phase and its accomplishments have been made a reality by the generous monetary donations and gifts in kind by patriotic members of the community and even those outside our community with the same patriotic love for our military and country. Three main walls in the memorial have been laser engraved. The Benefactors Wall lists those dozens of people and companies that have made this Memorial possible. The Branches of Service Wall lists the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines. The third wall, called the Freedom Wall, depicts a cemetery with crosses representing the cost of freedom since the beginning of our country. A monument for the Purple Heart as well as the Medal of Honor recipients stands next to the Branches of Service wall. The Peacoat Memorial represents all who were lost or buried at sea and have no earthly gravesite.

A meditation area was added for families to recollect and remember their loved ones. The Fallen Heroes Monument remembers the veterans of the Vietnam War. In the center of the park is the main monument. This monument is named Tears of Sadness and Joy. A person viewing the statue of a mother hugging her military son, the father observing, and the sister with her arms around her brother can be interpreted either as a homecoming or a sending off to duty. Next

to the soldiers' ultimate sacrifice are the sacrifices of the families who lend their sons and daughters to defend our country and protect our freedoms. The monument symbolizes the family unit that is so important to our nation. This is why the statue was chosen to be the focal point of our Orion Veterans Memorial. The focus of the Memorial is on world peace and the debt of honor to those who have served and sacrificed; the Memorial does not glorify war.

Memorials are built because sacrifice without remembrance is meaningless. America's collective consciousness demands that all citizens be aware of and recall on special occasions the deaths of their fellow countrymen. By honoring our community and nation's war dead, we preserve their memory and thus their service and sacrifice. They all had one thing in common; love and loyalty to their freedom and country. The Orion Veterans Memorial honors our community and the more than one million men and women who lost their lives defending America in wars from the Revolution to the now global war on terrorism. When you visit the Memorial and see flowers or some personal memorabilia that a visitor has left on an engraved named brick or witness the tears that someone sheds, you realize and understand what an impact the Orion Veterans Memorial has on people's lives.

The Memorial's most precious commodities are its volunteers. They are priceless and without them the work would come to a screeching halt. Each and every person working for the memorial is a volunteer. Many hours are spent to keep the Memorial progressing in the planning stage and being physically maintained. Since 2001, Bob Watros and his crew of veterans have made sure that the Memorial Park is kept in pristine condition giving it their almost daily attention. In addition, they prepare the Memorial for the five ceremonies held each year: The National Day of Prayer and Memorial Day in May, Patriots Day in September, Veterans Day in November, and Pearl Harbor Day in December. All are welcome to attend and be a part of these ceremonies.

Hundreds have donated contributions as individuals, families, corporations and organizations by putting names on a donated engraved brick. The engraved bricks in the center of the memorial have the names of those who have served in the military, living or deceased. There is a designated walkway for engraved bricks to be placed honoring persons, companies, or organizations that have shown their support for the Memorial.

Adapted from the Fall 2014 Orion Township *Outreach* **Message from the Supervisor**; written by Chris Barnett.