

MIDDLETOWN

Volunteers honor vets with park clean-up

Saturday was the first day of work on a township veterans memorial park that should be finished sometime next year.

By CHRIS ENGLISH STAFF WRITER

Cheryl Tanner dropped her normal routine Saturday and picked up a rake, shovel and hoe to honor those who have defended her country.

The Lower Makefield resident was among more than 200 who planted trees, mulched, pulled out invasive plants and did other work at the site of the Veterans Memorial Park in Middletown. Included in the group were about 150 Comcast employees, who volunteered as part of Comcast Cares Day, an annual event that Saturday saw about 50,000 company employees participate in various projects around the country.

For Tanner, few causes are more worthy than paying homage to veterans. Pointing to the neatly mulched beds with freshly planted trees, and the huge pile of nuisance plants soon to be gone, she was happy to see the beginnings of a park that should take shape over the next few months and, hopefully, be finished by sometime next year.

"I like to give back to those who have given me so much," said Tanner, who brought along her son and a niece and nephew for the day. "I didn't know I would enjoy it this much. Put 200 people together and give them some food and drink, and it's amazing how much can be accomplished."

Brian Jeter, Comcast's director of governmental affairs for Bucks County, took a break from his landscaping Saturday to announce that the company will be making a \$5,000 donation to the Middletown Community Foundation for work at the veterans memorial park.

"We're thrilled to help kick things off for this park," he said. "It's a great public/private partnership."

The park is located on a 2-acre property adjacent to the township public works complex on Veterans Highway [Route 413] near the intersection with Trenton Road. A township veterans committee chaired by Vietnam veteran James Remer is heading up the planning and fund raising for the project.

Officials pitching in on Saturday and also making short speeches were Bucks County Commissioners Diane Marseglia and James Cawley, state Rep. Chris King, D-142, and representatives from the offices of Congressman Patrick Murphy, D-8, and state Sen. Tommy Tomlinson, R-6.

Remer said he was overjoyed by the turnout and progress on the park, which eventually will include a small gazebo, areas for the American and other flags, a wall with plaques honoring veterans and other features.

"It was incredible," he said. "And one of the other nice things is that everyone here made about four new friends today."

Dozens of white replica headstones lined the park Saturday. All had pictures and information about Pennsylvania soldiers killed in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Remer said many unions already have committed to donate labor and materials to the veterans memorial park. He and other members of the veterans committee, which includes township director of Licenses and Inspections Jim Peet, will work to line up donations from corporations or any other source they can find.

"I'll go anywhere and everywhere and talk to everyone and anyone," said Remer.

He invited the public to check out an event at the park from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 17 that will feature encampments meant to resemble those from the American Revolution, Civil War, World Wars I and II and the Korean War. Among the other highlights that day are tours of an old World War II tank. Which is being stored at the township public works complex and will be part of the veterans park when it's finished, said Remer.

To donate, help in some other way or for more information about the veterans memorial park, call 215-750-3825 or 215-547-3706 or visit middleschool.org on the Web. King represents Langhorne, Langhorne Manor, Hulmeville, Pennel, most of Middletown and most of Lower Southampton.

Murphy represents Bucks County, districts of Abington, Upper Dublin and Upper Moreland in Montgomery County and two wards in Philadelphia.

Tomlinson represents Bensalem, Bristol Township, Bristol, Middletown, Langhorne, Langhorne Manor, Lower Southampton, Pennel, Hulmeville, Northampton, Wrightstown, Ivyland and Warwick.

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Emily Smith places a flag in front of a marker of a soldier who died in the Iraq war. Nearly 200 markers are on display at Veterans Memorial Park in Middletown. On Saturday, volunteers cleaned the park and planted trees to honor Pennsylvania's fallen heroes.

KIM WEIMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER