

Coventry OKs Vietnam memorial

By **DAVID HINCHEY**
Chronicle Staff Writer

COVENTRY — Jean Risley, the Coventry woman looking to build a Vietnam War memorial, now has a place to put it after the town council voted unanimously Monday to place the memorial at the town's Veterans Memorial Green.

Risley, who had approached the council back in July about building a memorial to honor the 612 Connecticut servicemen who lost their lives in the Vietnam War, designed the memorial to look like the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. The site of the memorial will be on the town's Veteran's Memorial Green and be located at the intersection of Cross and Lake street.

After the meeting, an elated Risley — along with a dozen members of the "American Legion Riders," a group of American Legion Post 14 members from Rockville — was glad to finally have a place to put the monument.

She said it will honor all the servicemen who served their country and, among them, her brother who died in the war, Robert Tillquist.

"It feels great," she said. "I didn't want to fight, that's not what it's about," Risley said, on the mini-controversy that stirred in

town over where to place the memorial. "I'm happy we've come to an agreement on a spot," she said. "Now it's a reality and I'm very happy."

Risley had originally approached the town's veterans committee on putting the memorial on the town's memorial green, but had met some "resistance," she said at the meeting.

"That's where it belongs," Risley said, adding when she decided she wanted to build this memorial, she believed it should go on the town's memorial green, where it honors those from town who served their country.

Last month, Risley met with school Superintendent Donna Bernard on putting the memorial in front of the Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School, but that idea was rejected by the Coventry Public Schools Administrative Council.

Bernard said the council rejected the idea in fear other veterans groups would want to put a memorial on school grounds.

Risley had received word the administrative council was rejecting the plan after she returned from a six-day trip to Washington D.C., an annual trip she makes to meet with members of her brother's military company.

Republican Councilman Tho-

mas Pope had originally wanted to send a letter to Bernard requesting the schools reconsider their decision and if the school department rejected it again, there would have been a town hall site. Pope later withdrew his motion in favor of putting it on the green.

Democratic councilmen claimed Pope's original motion of having the school department revisit the issue was "divisive."

"We have no idea what went into their decision," Democratic Councilman Liz Woolf said, adding she supported the memorial, but the school may not have wanted the memorial near the school for safety reasons, namely keeping strangers off site.

"Well, we can move it 25 feet to the west (and put it on town hall property) and the children can be 25 feet safer," Pope snapped.

Risley has registered her organizing group as a 501(c3) organization, so donations might be tax deductible, pending a ruling from the Internal Revenue Service. Risley has raised more than \$6,000, nearly a quarter of the \$28,000 price tag for a memorial.

To make a donation, send a check to C.V.V.M.I. (Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial Inc.) care of Paul Jatkowski, treasurer, 91 Upton Drive, Coventry 06238.