

FUNDRAISING EFFORT FOR VIETNAM MEMORIAL SUCCEEDS

By **STEPHANIE SUMMERS**
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COVENTRY — A spaghetti dinner here, 280 motorcycle riders there, a big private donor and, voilà, Jean Risley has her statewide Vietnam War memorial.

COVENTRY

With a \$5,000 check she received Wednesday from a Vietnam veteran from Farmington, Risley's one-woman-and-friends effort has exceeded the \$25,000 needed to order the black granite memorial.

On Sunday, her Coventry Motorcycle Fun Run raised more than \$8,000 — \$1,500 from the raffle alone — and drew state dignitaries, the Patriot Guard Riders and her beloved American Legion Post 14 Riders from Rockville, who

turned in more than \$2,000 from slinging pasta at an April event.

"Bikers get a bad name," Risley said Tuesday. "These guys ... whoo! ... it's going to take me forever to get over it."

The memorial, which will take Clark and Riley Memorials of Manchester four to six months to complete, will include four angled, granite panels on a gray granite base. The 612 names of Connecticut residents who died in the war will be engraved on the panels, adorned with the five armed service emblems and etched versions of the men's and women's monuments in Washington.

The entire project is estimated to cost \$38,000, less now that her Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial Inc. has tax-exempt status.

Because of several upcoming fundraisers and public momentum, Risley predicted, "I think we're going to hit this memorial by the end of June and have it

fully paid."

Risley, whose much-decorated brother Robert Tillquist died in the war, wrote in a solicitation letter, "After 41 years there is still no individual memorial within the state to honor these men. As American citizens we should be tripping over ourselves to make this right."

But she credits her passion to Coventry middle school students who researched the 612 Vietnam War dead from the state in 2001 and published a book of their biographies.

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ENDING what she perceives as a decades-long slight, Jean Risley of Coventry has raised enough money to commission a Vietnam War memorial.

MARC-YVES REGIS I / THE HARTFORD COURANT



T O W N S

Vietnam

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She went to the town to ask for a site, and the council said yes.

When a story about Risley's efforts ran in The Courant in March, Ken Boudreau of Farmington contacted her. The Vietnam veteran wanted to see her records and the project site on Coventry's Memorial Green. He told her then, if she raised \$20,000, he would donate \$5,000.

"I am amazed at the turnout but not surprised," Boudreau wrote Risley by e-mail this week after she reported Sunday's success to him. "You have a noble cause and remarkable personal commitment. I'd like to deliver on my promise in person as soon

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JEAN RISLEY

as possible."

At Sunday's ride, state Comptroller Nancy Wyman took Risley's arm and clicked in her high heels down the middle school driveway to wave the green flag to start the riders.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal spoke at the Corner Store, where the 22-mile ride ended.

State Commissioner of Veterans Affairs Linda Schwartz, a veteran herself, donated a big-ticket raffle item and came to the race.

In comments at the race's

start, Wyman told the crowd she passed a sign at a home that said "Welcome Home, Steve." Down the road, there was another homecoming sign. It said, "No More Iraq. Welcome Back to Connecticut."

"You never saw that when our Vietnam vets came home," she said Tuesday. "This is a remembrance for all those who served that we forgot to say thank you to when they came home."

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