

MEMORIAL

By Chris Rhatigan
Register Staff

MILFORD – The kids of West Shore Middle School are hitting the streets, asking area businesses if they can contribute to the construction of the Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial through buying tickets for an upcoming dinner/raffle fundraiser.

The memorial will be based on the Coventry town green and similar stylistically to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. It will contain the names of the 612 troops from the state who died in the war.

It will list each of their names on four panels made of jet black granite from South Africa, which will rest on a gray granite base.

West Shore history teacher Thomas Acri is helping organize the event and said it's a good opportunity for the students to get involved.

"This generation is a great generation. It's something for them to give back to the community," he said. "I am very proud of the work my students are doing to make this event a success. They have learned so much already."

Acri got the idea for the event when he met Jean Risley, of Coventry, at the Annual Milford Oyster Festival. Risley's brother, Robert Tillquest, died in Vietnam, and she's spearheading the effort to create the memorial. She had set up a booth at the festival to raise awareness for the cause.

"I met her I think by fate," Acri said.

Since then Acri worked with Risley to setup the Milford fundraiser. Acri said several officials are coming to the event, such as state's Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr., and state Sen. Gayle Slossberg, D-Milford.

Risley said she was inspired to seek funding for a memorial after working with kids at the Coventry Middle School on research about Vietnam veterans. She hopes the memorial will be complete at some point next year. Currently, she's raised \$11,000 for the memorial and will need \$38,000 total.

"I am doing this for the 612 men (from the state) who died in Vietnam, not just for my brother," she said. Risley has planned other events in the Coventry area and a fundraiser at a Bridgeport Bluefish minor league baseball game Aug. 19.

The fundraising dinner will be held at West Shore Middle School May 23 at 6 p.m. Those looking for more information can contact Acri at 874-2471 or tacri@milforded.org.

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