

Vietnam memorial drive reaches goal

By Jon Terbush

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COVENTRY — Sufficient donations have been made to make the final payment on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to be placed on the town green.

According to Jean Risley, who spearheaded the fundraising, about \$44,500 has been raised since last summer. Clark and Riley Memorials of Manchester is constructing the memorial for about \$38,000.

"It's really great. I didn't think it would happen this fast," Risley said.

Risley said she is aiming for groundbreaking sometime in September, with a dedication ceremony May 17, 2008.

Risley formed the Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee last July to begin raising money for a memorial to the 612 Connecticut soldiers who died in Vietnam, including her brother, Robert Tillquist. Since then, numerous personal donations have been made, and several fundraisers, including a motorcycle fun-run, have been held.

According to Risley, the memorial will be comprised of four large granite panels and will stretch 15 feet long and 6 feet high at the tallest point. The middle panels will be inscribed with the names of the 612 soldiers, and the end panels will be engraved with images of the Vietnam Nurses Memorial and the Three Soldiers statue in Washington D.C.

The memorial has not been without controversy, as some have said it is inappropriate for a small town like Coventry to erect a statewide memorial.

But Risley said until now, no municipality in Connecticut has made a memorial honoring Connecticut's Vietnam War dead. By constructing a memorial in Coventry, the town would fill that void, she said.

"You just need to do that. You just need to remember these men," Risley said. "Until now, nobody has welcomed them home."

Risley said donations are still needed to pay for landscaping and benches once the memorial is installed. Anyone interested in making a contribution may contact Jean Risley at 860-742-8841.