



GUEST EDITORIAL OPINION – September 11, 2013 – Thom Stoddert

Memorial will heal, bring local community together

The Joint American-Vietnamese Honor Memorial is to honor all veterans from that war, showing respect and gratitude.

It is a work in progress.

Lan Phan Jones, the daughter of a South Vietnamese soldier, began the project in appreciation of American-born veterans who served in her country. The idea gained speed with input from Auburn veterans. Thus plans were made for a monument in Auburn. The Joint American-Vietnamese Alliance was formed later to support this project.

This monument goes beyond a normal memorial's portrayal of a combat soldier of a particular era. Auburn acknowledges the sacrifices of women and medics who cared for what was left of the bloody carnage. Future plans will allow individuals to memorialize those lost, with names such as Gary Holz of Auburn.

This monument is to provide a place for all people, veterans and non-veterans of this region, to remember former comrades and mourn those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. It also is intended to be an educational tool, telling of sacrifices and history of that era, just as the Traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall has been for years while displayed at the present memorial park.

In the 1960s and early '70s, the errant news media was successful in turning the public against the Vietnam Conflict, which was really one part of the overall global "Cold War." Vietnam was an effort to contain communism, a cruel form of government that brutally enforced its power, outlawed basic freedoms and destroyed basic human values.

The South Vietnamese choose democracy and self-determination, basic American values. They lost their homeland through the same events that also left so many American-born Vietnam veterans feeling betrayed by their country. The yellow flag with three red stripes, now called the "freedom flag" in many Washington communities, is revered and cherished by an American community that has given much healing and reconciliation to us American-born veterans.

For Vietnam veterans, the yellow and three red stripes are still a very living symbol. It is one of the most common bumper stickers in Washington state. They are seen everywhere when vets get together. It represents many things, but most importantly it gives validation to the veterans, just as the Traveling Memorial Wall has done for those who have allowed it to do so. Some vets have bitter issues that must be dealt with. That is what the Veterans' Outreach Centers are doing.

All the projects like this have always faced resistance. In 1986, Auburn's Sarah Blum, a nurse veteran from the war, and a Vietnamese woman, also a nurse veteran, started a project to bring veterans together in Seattle. Although they were physically threatened, the gathering was a brilliant success. This was true for the projects in California, Texas, Kansas and Washington, D.C.

The Joint American-Vietnamese War Memorial intends to teach, enhance the quality of living and encourage commerce through tourism. However, the primary intention is for the future – tell the story of the cost of freedom-democracy-self determination.

There are many Vietnam vets who are pleading in tears to build it. The recent successful Vietnam Veteran Appreciation Dinner illustrated this, one-hundred guests coming on short notice from both communities.

It is our belief that if everyone who has a realistic concern over this project and contributes that concern, not in opposition, a greater project will be achieved. A win-win situation will be gained for all veterans, the City of Auburn, and the communities of Puget Sound. Think about what this says to the future.

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