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Vietnam Moving Wall Returns to Orland Park October 1-4



The Village of Orland Park will host The Vietnam Moving Wall as part of it being a community partner for the US Department of Defense Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War.

The Moving Wall will be on display at the Orland Park Village Center from noon on Thursday, October 1 through Sunday, October 4. The Orland Park Village Center is located at 14700 Ravinia Avenue, one block west of LaGrange Road.

"The Village of Orland Park is proud to host The Vietnam Moving Wall bringing an important part of our nation's history to residents from throughout the area," said Orland Park Mayor Dan McLaughlin. "In 2006, we first displayed the wall and we were humbled at the turnout. It's especially important to have the wall here during the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War with Orland Park being a community partner for the national commemoration."

The opening ceremony begins at 7 p.m. on Friday, October 2 with guest speakers and events planned throughout the weekend, including a Vietnam Veterans gathering room inside of the Orland Park Civic Center.

The Civic Center will display the Agent Orange Quilt of Tears, a collection of handmade quilt patches, paying tribute to the victims of Agent Orange exposure. Local residents' memorial tables will also be on display honoring family and friends who served in Vietnam.

Phil Bell, chair of the village's Veterans Commission and an Iraq War veteran, visited The Moving Wall in 2006 with his father, a Vietnam veteran. "My dad never wanted to see the wall but he went with me. When he got there, he opened up and talked about his friends that didn't make it."

Village of Orland Park Veterans Commission Secretary Gail Blummer remembered the remarkable volunteers who served as the honor guard, standing at both ends of the wall in 2006.

"A WWII veteran who fought in Iwo Jima refused to sit during his portion of his team's four-hour shift rotation," said Blummer. "He said he had seen and done a lot of things and wanted to stand for those who died."

Five Orland Park residents died in Vietnam including Ron Zinn, Dennis Stiehler, Eddie Novak, Michael Reber and Bobby McAllister. All of their names appear on the wall.

Orland Park's first casualty in Vietnam, Zinn is remembered with the Captain Ronald L. Zinn Memorial Garden in front of the village's Veterans Center on West Avenue. A 1957 Sandburg graduate, Zinn graduated from West Point and represented the United States in two Olympics, competing as a race walker.

"An Orland Park Boy Scout chose to remember Captain Zinn with his Eagle Scout Project last year because of his being the first from the community to die in Vietnam," Blummer said.

The Veterans Commission is looking for daytime and overnight volunteers to fill four hour shifts. Tasks include hosting the wall to maintain a quiet space and helping guests locate names on the wall. Shifts run from 12 a.m. to 4 a.m., 4 a.m. to 8 a.m., 8 a.m. to noon, noon to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. and 8 p.m. to midnight. Volunteers are need beginning Thursday, October 1 through Sunday, October 4.

"You don't have to be a veteran to volunteer and everyone is welcome to help the village host The Moving Wall," the mayor said.

Interested volunteers can email their name, address, cell phone and available day and shift to the Orland Park Veterans Commission veterans@orlandpark.org or leave their contact information and availability at 708/403-6115.

For more than 30 years, the half-size replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C. has toured the country, allowing those who cannot travel to our nation's capital to see the names of more than 58,000 military who died during the Vietnam War. The half size granite wall covers almost 300 feet from end to end and is six feet tall at the center.

Mayor McLaughlin has invited area Vietnam Veterans to submit their contact information to be notified about Orland Park's events held during the nationwide commemoration. Vets are invited to send their contact information to MayorsVietnamVets@orlandpark.org to be added to the mayor's list. Emails will only be used for this purpose.

"We have created a sizable mailing list of Vietnam Vets from throughout the region," McLaughlin said. "We invite all Vietnam Vets to send in their contact information so we can let them know what commemorative events are coming up."

Orland Park being a part of the Department of Defense 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War coincides with the village celebrating the 20th anniversary of its Veterans Memorial, Ara Pace – Place of Peace. Located south of the Frederick T. Owens Village Hall, the village's memorial was designed by renowned sculptor Virginio Ferrari and debuted on Veterans Day, 1995.