

Griffin/Spalding County (our Community) has a wonderful history as a community that honors our service men and women, as evidenced by our outstanding Memorial Day observances this year and every year, our many memorials and the high regard in which we hold those in our community that have served in the military.

As many, but not everyone, know we added a new dimension to those observances this year by honoring Lt. James Reese, a local native who was killed in action in VietNam, with a bronze plaque on the facade of the Imperial Theater Park on East Solomon Street. There were personal memories, an honor guard and "taps". One attendee said "it was the most moving event he ever went to". Many others agreed.

Since then families of KIA servicemen have asked if it is possible to do something similar for their lost loved ones. It's a tough question to answer, particularly since we are asking ourselves "Why not?".

Separately, many local citizens have expressed the feeling our Community would benefit from an identity makeover. Something positive that we are known for to the rest of the state. A Community wide effort that brings us together and gives us a sense of pride about the place where we live.

Out of those musings the following multifaceted concept, that conceivably could accomplish both objectives, has bubbled to the top and quickly taken on a life of its own due to the incredible support it has already generated.

CONCEPT

Every town in America has, as it should, memorials to their sons and daughters killed while serving in the military. But most of those memorials are probably a large piece of marble in a location where too few citizens actually read it. And if we do it is usually limited to a name only - connected to nothing except the war they died in. Additionally every town has a Memorial Day celebration that often comes and goes with far too little local awareness of its significance.

For instance, how many among us knows that from WWI till now one hundred fifty five young men and one young women from this small county have made the ultimate sacrifice for us and our country?

So what can all this mean to Griffin and Spalding County?

PHASE ONE

As far as can be determined , no town in America has individual bronze plaques on prominent buildings throughout their community for each one of their local heroes killed in action where the mere act of walking the street puts people face to face with that fact and forces them to be cognizant of their sacrifice. Griffin/Spalding County should be the community that does that for each of our local KIA heroes going back to WWI and coming forward to the War On Terror and beyond.

A committee has been formed, "Honor Our KIA", obviously made up of veterans but also of other local citizens and officials. A list of it founding members is attached.

To implement Phase One the Committee has identified the following objectives:

- a. create a selection process for the timing and order for those who would be so honored;
- b. locate and communicate with their families;
- c. raise money for the plaques;
- d. get permission of downtown property owners to put plaques on their buildings;
- e. organize the dedication ceremony (ceremonies).

Simultaneously publicize that our Community is undertaking this project and create a tagline by which we would hopefully become known. "Hometown Of Heroes" or whatever, so long as we can say it about ourselves with pride.

Plaques would be put up until each local KIA has been recognized. How often that would happen and in what order would be determined by the Committee. Depending on how often plaques are installed this project could take several years to complete. Once that effort has progressed to a reasonable point a walking tour brochure would be created and distributed from the Chamber of Commerce office for the use of visitors and locals alike.

PHASE TWO:

Through advertising and the news media we invite families across Georgia who have lost a loved one in combat to come here either on designated weekends or by appointment throughout the year to participate in an oral history project - unique in America - to celebrate each of those lives but to do it in our own special way. Not by detailing how they died but by memorializing how they lived.

Participating families would be interviewed by local volunteers and share memories of their lost family member as a child or teenager or young adult: he or she was mischievous, a great athlete, lousy musician, loved practical jokes, wanted to be a preacher or never gave a thought to the future, loved fast cars, worked at night to get through school, planned to marry his high school sweetheart or never got home to to meet his newborn child, etc., etc. The kind of details that give the impersonal names on a monument life, vitality, meaning. The life, vitality and meaning that will be lost forever when the people who actually knew him or her have passed away.

Those stories and memories will be videoed and preserved permanently either in our local or state or national archives (or all three) and made readily available to future generations for numerous purposes.

It is hard to imagine any family in Georgia that would not welcome a chance to memorialize the "life" history of their lost young man or woman. Each of those families must passionately believe their loved ones life was much more than the statistics on a memorial or a written page. The opportunity to make that life known and honored and a lasting part of their family history as well as our country's history would be an overwhelming incentive to participate.

PHASE THREE:

Phase One and Two would culminate annually with a weekend of activities to coincide with our National Memorial Day observation. Over those two or three days the primary focus would continue to be recognizing and telling the stories of local KIA who have been honored with a plaque as well as statewide KIA whose families have participated in the oral history project in the previous year.

That could include temporary displays, photos, memorabilia, a documentary featuring excerpts from videos, the opportunity for families and visitors to view their's and other's videos, a ceremony that recognizes each hero by name, a prominent speaker, a cd copy for them of each families interview and so on.

Over that weekend the opportunities for related activities is almost unlimited: family and military reunions, patriotic music festival, events and competitions, lectures, tours, etc.

The idea is both celebrate National Memorial Day in a suitably dignified way that befits the circumstances and yet do it on a larger scale that will result in a resurgence of patriotic fervor locally and hopefully state wide.

What better image could our Community possibly project than this - the most patriotic community in Georgia!

PHASE FOUR:

Tourism. There is nothing inappropriate with promoting a patriotic event that draws tourists. It is done every day at places like Gettysburg, Valley Forge and the Alamo in ways that simultaneously educate and inspire. Our event, conducted with the correct degree of dignity and reverence, could reasonably be expected to achieve the same thing.

Roswell, Georgia has a well promoted one day program of a speaker, picnic and martial band that draws 6000 to 7000 each year. Using that as a bench mark we could reasonably expect to draw that and many, many more considering our expanded program of unique events. Of those, a conservative estimate might be at least one half would be from out of town. Assuming those kinds of numbers are reasonable, the economic impact of that many visitors that weekend and throughout the year (many of whom would stay overnight or over a weekend) would be dramatic.

Conclusion:

This concept, once implemented, has the realistic prospect to:

- Create an extraordinarily meaningful and lasting experience for the participating families;
- Create a data base about these fallen heroes that will permanently preserve their life stories;
- Create a resurgence of patriotic pride in our community;
- Create an ongoing economic impact locally far exceeding anything we currently do;
- Create a highly positive image for our community that itself would have multiple beneficial effects.

Each and every one of these is a more than worthwhile objective. Together they represent not only that but an opportunity to make Griffin and Spading County a model of what a small community with a big idea, a big heart, a long memory and a proud heritage can do.

Currently "Honor Our KIA" is well on the way to solidifying plans to implement the foregoing concept and welcomes contact information for families of local service men and women KIA, related human interest stories or memorabilia, suggestions and volunteers. Contact us at

honorourkia@gmail.com or 770-468-9511

Local officials and private citizens have come together to form a committee known as Honor Our KIA Committee. Our purpose is initially to honor service men and women from Griffin and Spalding County killed in action (KIA) while in the armed services of this country from World War I till the present day.

Recently an individual bronze plaque honoring Griffin native Marine Lt. James Reese, killed in Viet Nam, was installed on the facade of the Imperial Theater Park on West Solomon Street.

Taking inspiration from the overwhelmingly positive reaction to that event the Honor Our KIA committee was formed to expand that concept to honor other local KIA in the same way by placing individual plaques on prominent buildings throughout downtown. In that way it is hoped the general public, as we go about our daily routines, will see these plaques and be reminded repeatedly of those heroes who died in defense of our liberties.

Griffin and Spalding County have a proud history as a community that honors our veterans, living and deceased, as evidenced by our numerous monuments and patriotic celebrations. Our hope is to build on and expand that historical heritage in appropriate ways to further honor local KIA and raise awareness of their sacrifice among our citizens so that those who gave their lives on our behalf will not be forgotten.

Once this initial objective is in place as an ongoing event, our Committee has additional plans for an oral history project to preserve the "life" stories of Georgia's KIA and expanded Memorial Day observances that will attract large crowds here to participate.

The ultimate goals of this project, once fully implemented, is to:

- *Create a positive image statewide for Griffin/Spalding County ;
- *Create a resurgence locally of patriotic pride that will unite and energize our citizens;
- *Create individual memorials in prominent places to honor our local KIA in an very appropriate way;
- *Create a oral archive about all of Georgia's fallen heroes that will permanently preserve their life stories;
- *Create an extraordinarily meaningful experience for the participating families;
- *Create through these activities cumulatively - bringing participants to town, promoting

a positive image for our Community, etc. - an ongoing economic impact exceeding anything we currently do to promote ourselves.

The first step to accomplish all this is to make sure that by placing commemorative plaques on buildings throughout the city we are in conformity with all requisite ordinances, codes, rules and regulations. That is why we are here. We want to make sure we have the appropriate permission, if any is needed, to proceed.

The second step is to ask for your moral support. We will be asking for the same vote of confidence from all other pertinent entities as well. The reason being to establish our credibility in the minds not just of the general public but of the different organizations we will be partnering with or through. As an example, we are currently working with Gordan and Southern Crescent and will soon be seeking alliances with other similar institutions, locally and beyond, that possibility may have less acquaintance with our committee members. Your statement of support would be a big help in this regard.

Thanks you.

Frequently asked questions:

What is the procedure for deciding who is honored and when.

The Plaque sub-committee will set criteria for which KIA will be selected, in what order, etc. Families of KIA, if it is possible to locate them, will have the option to participate or not, participate in locating "their" plaque, etc.

How are buildings selected as sites?

The owners of buildings that the committee identify as being suitable will be contacted and asked to participate. If they agree they will sign a perpetual easement to that effect.

Who will pay for the plaques?

Money for the first twelve (first year?) is already pledged. After that contributions from all sources will be solicited. Families may contribute if they want to, but will not be asked to.

Is this the same effort that is currently going on to build a new monument to local KIA in the War On Terror?

The Honor Our KIA Committee is 1000% committed to the success of that effort and will support it in every possible way. But, that is a completely separate project by the local Military Affairs Committee to create a monument to honor KIA heroes killed in the War On Terror only. Our committee is dedicated to, over a period years to come, honoring ALL local KIA from WWI till now (including the War On Terror) in a different way but one that compliments Military Affairs efforts. Additionally, beyond plaques, Honor Our KIA will pursue an oral history project and expanded Memorial Day ceremonies.

What other plans do you have to expand this idea and promote patriotism in this community?

We are working on an oral history project that will bring people from around the state here to honor in a permanent way the memory of the early lives of "their" KIA. The concept will be the first of its kind in America we believe and will result in positive recognition for this community. That effort and the plaque program will culminate with a greatly expanded Memorial Day celebration, again we think unique in this country.

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