

MEMORIAL PEACE GARDENS HONOR FALLEN SOLDIERS



PHOTO BY JONATHAN SAMPLES | BUGLE STAFF

Korean War veterans place wreath during the Downers Grove South Memorial Peace Garden dedication May 26.

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Memorial Peace Gardens honor fallen soldiers

Downers Grove North, South high schools dedicate memorials for former students who died in U.S. Armed Forces

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Light rain mixed with heavy hearts during a May 26 dedication ceremony for the Downers Grove South High School Memorial Peace Garden.

Students, school officials and the families of former District 99 students who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces gathered outside of South High's west entrance for the first of two dedication ceremonies scheduled on the Thursday before Memorial Day.

"We are here to remember the lives of the men we lost, we are here to honor their service, and we are here to pledge our commitment to teach future generations the cost of freedom and the necessity to work

toward peaceful solutions," said Jenne Dehmlow, social studies department chair at Downers Grove North High School.

Christopher Esposito, social studies department chair at South High, said the work to create permanent Memorial Peace Gardens at both schools began about two years ago.

"We must teach our young people the cost of war, and that cost is lives," Esposito told the crowd.

In total, more than 80 former District 99 students have died in the line of service.

Among those who did not return home were U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy Bessa, who graduated from South High in 2000; U.S. Marine Sgt. Thomas Gilbert, a 2000 graduate from North High; and Marine Cpl. Joseph E. Stevenson III, who graduated from North High in 2005.

The families of all three men attended the dedication ceremonies.

"Thank you all for being here to honor the sacrifice that these beloved young people have given in the name of honor, commitment and freedom," Gilbert's father, Michael, said to those in attendance. "We honor their deaths and all these devoted Americans because we should and it's right. We honor their commitment to our well being and to their fellow servicemen. Please remember these brave and beloved Americans for the sacrifice they gave us. May God bless the fallen."

A dedication ceremony for the North High Memorial Peace Garden was held later in that afternoon.

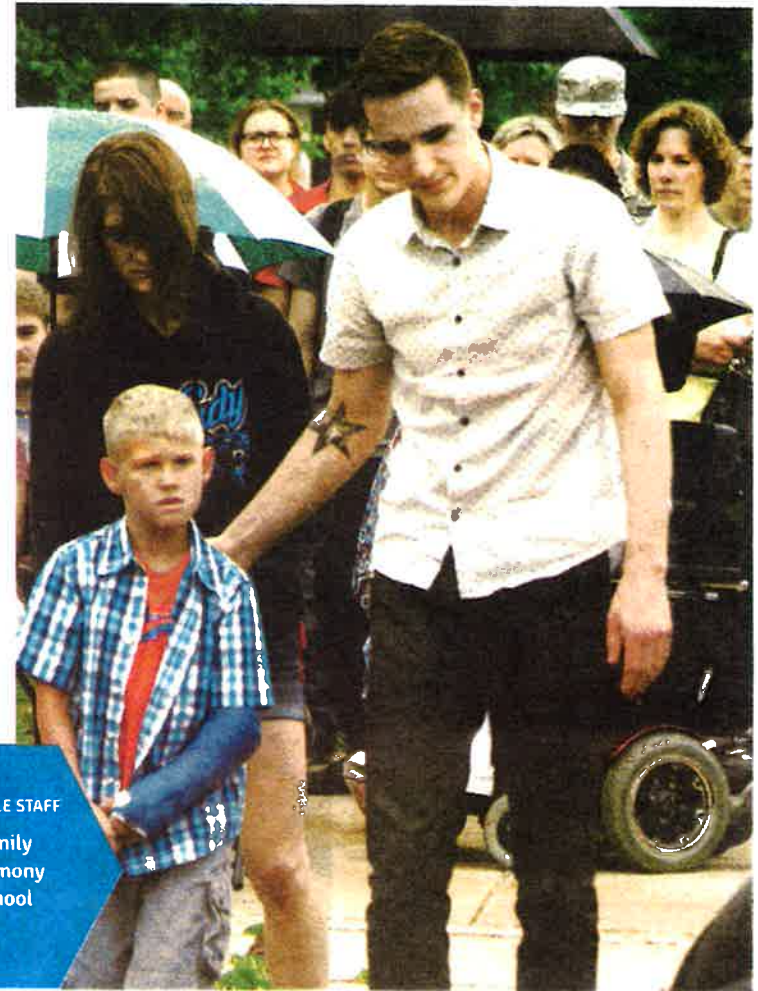


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Jeremy Bessa's son, Carson, 7, and family participate in May 26 dedication ceremony for the Downers Grove South High School Memorial Peace Garden.