

Memorial Day celebration continues in Grants

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GRANTS — Cibola County citizens have gathered at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Friendship and Fire and Ice Parks every Memorial Day since 2009. This year, they had to pay their respects differently.

Despite the current pandemic, a turnout that would normally see over 100 people, saw about 20 show up at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Friendship Park on Grants' west end.

"I wish we would have had a lot more people come out, but we didn't advertise it in the paper," Grants Mayor Modey Hicks told the *Gallup Sun*. "We had people come in from out of town."

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“We do it every School is filled day that we can’t honor our dead that have fought for this country, and that’s what they’re trying to do ... it’s insane.”

Aaron Dean, the commander for the American Legion Post 80 in Grants, was one of the attendees and speakers at the park.

Dean served in the Marine Corps for three years during the Vietnam War.

“We do this every year on Memorial Day at 11 [am] and on Veteran’s Day. American Legion Post 80, the auxiliary, puts up a wreath for the memorial, so we’re going to keep it going,” Dean said. “I’ve got a lot of buddies, a lot of family out there. [Memorial Day] is about remembering.”

At the conclusion of the wreath ceremony, citizens drove about one mile east to Fire and Ice Park to find the grassy area covered in painted white metal crosses. Each cross, 926 in total, features the name of a citizen from Cibola County who served in the United States military.

The first year, the memorial featured 296 crosses.

The crosses bear the names of veterans who served between the Civil War and Desert Storm.

The American Legion sponsors the placing of the crosses and Dean said it took almost four weeks to get permission from the State of New Mexico to get the 2020 memorial approved.

One of the stipulations for approval called for no publicly scheduled mass gathering or ceremony at Fire and Ice Park. Rather, citizens could come to the park to see the memorial while practicing social distancing.

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Volunteers helped by hammering the crosses into the ground starting on May 20.

“No matter how you look, diagonal, horizontal, any way you want to look, [the crosses] are pretty close to straight,” Dean said.

Hicks, a veteran of the Marine Corps, helped with the placing of the crosses and said he was proud when he saw his brother’s cross.

Hicks’ brother Butch served in the Army as a medic during the Vietnam War, but ultimately committed suicide when he returned home from the war.

The memorial stood until 5 pm on Memorial Day, when volunteers took the crosses down.

The City of Grants made headlines in late April when Hicks challenged Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham’s April 11 public health order. He called on businesses to reopen amid the restrictions.

“Stand up for your constitutional rights. Open your businesses if you want to, if you feel like it, and you can do it. We know how to do it safely. If Walmart can do it, anybody can do it,” Hicks said in his message to the residents of Grants and northwestern New Mexico.

This year’s Fourth of July parade that features dozens of floats traveling from West Santa Fe Avenue to First Street is expected to be held as planned.

By Dominic Aragon
Sun Correspondent