



Long Beach, Calif., Vice Mayor Rex Richardson cuts the ribbon at the new Valor Plaza. Holding the ribbon to his left is Mayor Robert Garcia. LIEZL ESTIPONA, CITY OF LONG BEACH

Community commemorations

Across the country, hundreds of sites now pay tribute to Vietnam veterans

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Special to USA TODAY

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is an emotional touchstone that draws more than 5.6 million visitors a year. Some scour the wall's 58,318 names for those of friends or relatives. Others simply reflect, wondering

what the war was like if they didn't live through it, remembering if they did. It's a powerful place.

But it's not the only place. Memorials in communities across the country pay respect to those who fought and died in the conflict in Vietnam.

One is at Valor Plaza in Long Beach, Calif., where a decommissioned Huey helicopter hovers over the names of 108 local men who died in the war. Originally dedicated in 2000, the plaza had spent the past several years behind a locked fence, erected to deter vandals.

"You couldn't get up close and experience the memorial the way it was intended to be experienced," says Long Beach Vice Mayor Rex Richardson. When he

took office in 2014, he says, he made it a personal mission to reopen the site to visitors. His office spent \$275,000 on fresh landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, seating and signage. The revitalized Valor Plaza was dedicated anew on Nov. 11, 2017: Veterans Day.

"The people I represent care deeply about Vietnam veterans, and in my opinion it's absolutely critical that we continue to recognize those who sacrificed," Richardson says.

That recognition means a lot to veterans such as Marc Leepson, arts editor, senior writer and columnist for *The VVA Veteran*, the national magazine of Vietnam Veterans of America.

"When the war was over, the nation

turned its back on us," Leepson says. Attitudes finally changed, he says, after the 1982 dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. "Overwhelmingly, people finally stopped blaming the warrior for the war, and that led to a nationwide effort to memorialize those who served and died. It was a real cathartic thing for the country and for me."

In the 1990s, Vietnam Veterans of America began compiling information on state and local memorials to Vietnam veterans. Although he doesn't have a comprehensive list, Leepson estimates that there are more than 1,500 such memorials nationwide.

Here are a few of the more notable memorials.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial of Greater Rochester (N.Y.)

This memorial covers 2.5 acres in Rochester's Highland Park. Dedicated in 1996, it includes a grove of trees honoring Vietnam-era Medal of Honor recipients and a walkway with 280 bollards bearing the names of Rochester-area servicemembers killed or missing in action.



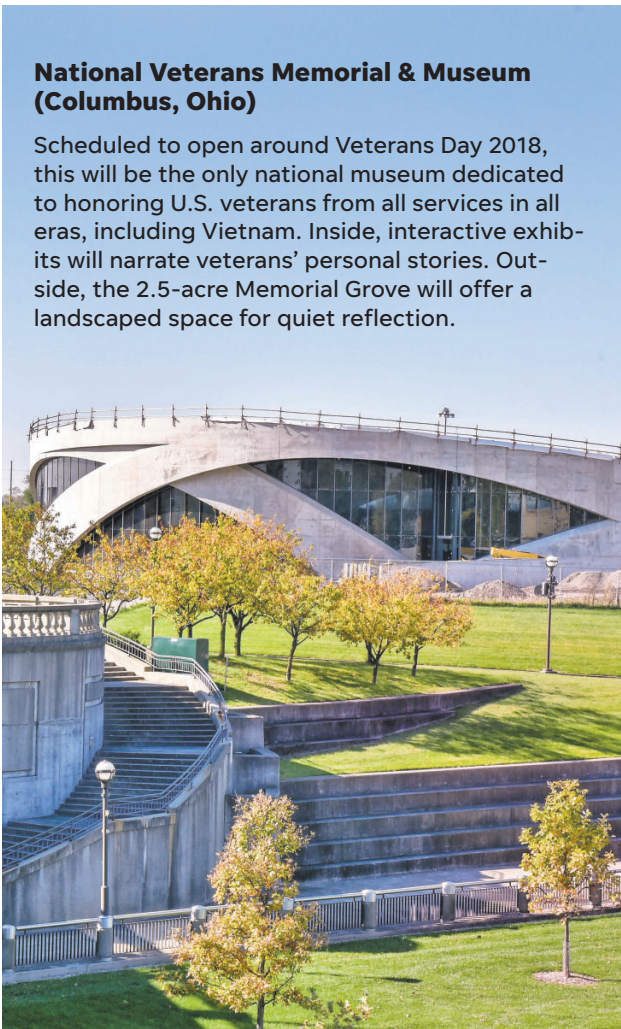
TINA MACINTYRE-YEE, ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE



J. DOUGLAS MACY

Oregon Vietnam Veterans Living Memorial (Portland)

Dedicated in 1987, this memorial occupies a hillside at Hoyt Arboretum, within Portland's Washington Park. A spiral path traces the sides of a grassy bowl in the earth, ending at a black granite wall bearing the names of Oregonians killed in the war.



RANDALL L. SCHIEBER

National Veterans Memorial & Museum (Columbus, Ohio)

Scheduled to open around Veterans Day 2018, this will be the only national museum dedicated to honoring U.S. veterans from all services in all eras, including Vietnam. Inside, interactive exhibits will narrate veterans' personal stories. Outside, the 2.5-acre Memorial Grove will offer a landscaped space for quiet reflection.



HERALD-LEADER/MCT VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Frankfort)

Dedicated in 1988, this unique landmark overlooks the State Capitol and honors 125,000 Kentuckians who served in Vietnam. The names of 1,105 who died in the war are inscribed around a giant sundial. On the anniversary of each veteran's death, the gnomon's shadow touches that person's name in tribute.

Dogwood Vietnam Memorial (Charlottesville, Va.)

Created in 1966, the nation's first Vietnam veterans memorial is known locally as "the hill that heals." Occupying a grassy knoll in McIntire Park, the memorial honors 26 fallen servicemen from Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

Texas Capitol Vietnam Veterans Monument (Austin)

The nation's newest memorial was dedicated in 2014 on the northeast side of the Texas Capitol grounds. Its centerpiece is a 14-foot bronze sculpture of five infantrymen, inside of which are personalized dog tags honoring each of the 3,417 Texans who died in Vietnam. There's also a "living monument" — an online educational archive of stories, photos and videos preserving the history of Texans in the Vietnam War.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Washington)

Located just north-east of the Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is free to visit and is open 24 hours a day.

The memorial includes the names of more than 58,000 men and women who gave their lives in service in the Vietnam conflict. The memorial also includes the statue *The Three Servicemen* and the Vietnam Women's Memorial.

National Park Service