

THE BEGINNING

Cyndi McDermott was sitting on her patio one day in early August of 2014 looking at some pictures of Freedom Rocks that she and her husband Terry had seen over the past few years. She wondered why no one in Dubuque County had applied for one yet. So, she asked Terry for the down payment to get one in Dubuque County if she could get a group with a 501c to do it with her. She thought of Josh Jasper, who is a former Marine, and was the head of Resources Unite. She gave Josh a call and asked him to come sit on her patio with her, she had a proposal for him. The next day they met and she showed him the information on the Freedom Rocks and asked for his help. Of course, he would! And from there the ball started rolling. She immediately sent in the application and they were accepted to have the Dubuque County Freedom Rock. Since Epworth is approximately the center of the county, she got permission from the Epworth City Council to put it on their property. She then made numerous phone calls to enlist the help and donations from everyone and anyone that she could think of in the county to get it done. The response was tremendous! Nobody said no to her request for help.

THE PAINTING ON THE ROCK

The painting on the south facing side of the rock depicts the Governor Greys, which transitioned to the Iowa National Guard. The Dubuque County connection to the Iowa National Guard is the Iowa National Guard Company A 1st Battalion 133rd Infantry. The National Guard soldier in the painting depicts Phillip Silker of Epworth, who served almost 40 years with the unit. The North facing side of the rock depicts local residents and their sacrifices while serving during various wars.

From left to right as you are looking at the rock, the first is Father Aloysius Schmitt who was the chaplain aboard the USS Oklahoma which went down during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He heroically saved others on the ship before the ship went down. He was the first chaplain to die in World War II.

Next is representing all those injured in the service, inspired by US Army Combat Engineer Rich Billmeyer from Epworth. He was wounded by an IED while performing route clearance operations in Afghanistan. He lost both legs above the knee in the blast and spent 18 months relearning how to walk with prosthetics.

Next is Army nurse Maj. Genevieve Smith. As a WWII nurse Smith was set to retire after 22 years of service. Instead she accepted a request to go to Korea to open a hospital for the soon to be Korean War. During her flight from Japan to Korea

the plane crashed and everyone but one person on the plane perished.

The last one depicts Vietnam Veteran Bob Kluesner who was a machine gunner. Bob was in many firefights and was repeatedly wounded and sent back to fight. According to accounts, in his last firefight, he reached to unjam his machine gun and was shot in the hand. The Vietnamese then shot him in the back of the head, rolled him over and shot him in the chest to confirm the kill. He was placed on the pile designated for bodies and body parts. After many hours, someone heard him moan and they got him out on a helicopter to a hospital in Japan. He eventually made it back to the states. He did his rehabilitation at Great Lakes Hospital. He received 4 purple hearts and numerous other medals.

On the west side of the rock is a depiction for the MIA/POW's. there is also a plaque with the names of the MIA's in Dubuque County.

The flag draped over the top of the rock is a signature of the artist.

As a granddaughter, daughter, niece and wife of a veteran, this was a labor of love to honor all veterans. I am sincerely thankful for all the donations that helped make this dream a reality. I hope you enjoy it.