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URGENT

## WATCH NOW: Fallen heroes honored with Memorial Day celebrations in NWI

Mary Freda  
May 25, 2020



Al Pulido, of American Legion Post 66 in Griffith, salutes an American Flag in Central Park on Monday. The town held a Memorial Day ceremony in the park, which about 20 people attended.

Mary Freda

**G**ary Harris usually walks around Central Park in Griffith to reminisce, pray and walk.

On Monday, the Vietnam veteran happened upon the town's Memorial Day ceremony — which was canceled a week ago, but modified on Sunday evening to a livestreamed event.

"I just walked up here because I heard the music, and it was a beautiful ceremony," Harris said. "I really appreciate the town of Griffith did that because I am a veteran ... and a lot of veterans are not noticed, especially guys from Vietnam."

Harris sat on a park bench, quite some feet away from the Central Park Army Tank and War Memorial.

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At 18, Harris enlisted for the Vietnam War and found himself fighting in the Tet Offensive. He was there for 14 months.

"The country didn't believe in the war, and it was hard for the soldiers at (the) time to fight because a lot of us got discouraged, but I saw a lot of devastation, death," Harris said.

"A lot of people don't remember. Even the people who are fighting now in Afghanistan or Iraq. People got to remember soldiers, man."

 Former Crown Point mayor leaves legacy as 'mainstay' of Memorial Day events

 95-year-old WWII vet reflects on serving in Patton's Third Army, life after war

 76 hours of battle: Dyer WWII veteran recalls invading Tarawa

Monday's celebration in Griffith was created to do just that: remember and honor veterans, said Al Pulido, a 53-year member of the American Legion.

"I've tried to do everything I can to honor our veterans, anytime," said Pulido, who served in the United States Navy during the Vietnam era.

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Pulido comes from a family of veterans: his dad served in World War II. His oldest brother spent 35 years in the United States Air Force. His second oldest brother fought in the Korean War with the United States Army. His younger brother was gunner with the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War.

 Region towns cope with consequences of canceled summer events

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He often visits the graves of his dad and younger brother, making sure to bring an American flag with him in case the cemetery doesn't display them during the holiday.

Griffith Town Council President Rick Ryfa said around 9 p.m. Sunday, the town's decision to cancel Memorial Day festivities was reversed and a small ceremony was planned for Central Park.

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About 14-15 hours later, loud speakers at Central Park blared patriotic tunes, a 21-gun salute and taps to honor fallen heroes.

"There was no cancellation of the war when tens of thousands of our American soldiers died," Ryfa said. "We can't forget the whole reason for Memorial Day, (and) we did not want anybody to forget by not doing this for a year."

 **Service dogs give veterans a new leash on life**

 **Vietnam veteran advocates for families of fallen soldiers**

 **Female veteran reflects on gender stereotypes in military**

Ben Bagwell, a Vietnam veteran, said he hadn't heard of the celebration, but stopped his truck when he found out what was happening.

"The day means a lot to me, because I want my kids and future generations (to) know what we had went through. I saw a lot of men die, and I tried to help a lot of them get back," Bagwell said.

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### **'It's an honor'**

Over the past week, flags have gone up around municipalities in the Region, including at the graves of fallen veterans. Pulido said American Legion Post 66 in Griffith put 1,200 flags in the veteran's section of Chapel Lawn Memorial Gardens.

American Legion Post 20 did the same over the holiday weekend, double checking and placing dozens of flags at gravestones at the Historic Maplewood Cemetery in Crown Point.

"I just consider this an honor for those men and women who gave their lives for our country. It's just a sign of respect," said Jim Powers, a three-year Legion member.

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📄 ALLIE KIRKMAN: Region WWII hero remembered for Popp-ing personality, valor

📄 Whiting Vietnam veteran remembers his father, World War II hero

📄 'I'm glad I got to serve': Crown Point World War II veteran reflects on his military service

Powers, who served in the Marine Corps. in the 1980s, said while the Legion was still able to participate in the city's virtual Memorial Day ceremony, the holiday was a somber event.

"Hopefully, it makes everyone just think a little bit more about the ultimate sacrifice," Powers said. "We kind of complain that we can't go out to the stores and to the restaurants, while these people gave the ultimate sacrifice."

Crown Point Virtual Memorial Day Ceremony - 05/25/20



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Harry Stone, a Vietnam veteran, was out placing flags at the cemetery on Saturday.

The 14-year member of the Legion said this was the first year he was able to place the flags: "It's an honor."

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 Hobart WWII veteran honored with Quilt of Valor

 Saluting hometown heroes: WWII vets reflect on their service 75 years later

Though the Legion wasn't able to gather at the cemetery for its traditional event, Stone said that doesn't change the meaning of Memorial Day.

"Just because this has happened doesn't mean we can't pay respects to our fallen heroes," Stone said. "This (is) what this is all about. Whether it be with 100 people or one person, it's still in honor of our veterans, our fallen heroes."

American Legion Post 20 Cmdr. Les Easto said the servicemen and women honored Monday came from all walks of life.

"They didn't go to war because they loved to fight. They were called to be a part of something bigger than themselves," Easto said. "They were ordinary people who responded extraordinary in extreme times. They rose to the nations call because they wanted to protect our nation, which had given them and us so much."

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Crown Point Mayor David Uran, who kicked off the city's virtual ceremony, said the holiday is a time for people to connect with history and its core values by honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

"Memorial Day is a time to remember that American way of life is not cheap, but rather being purchased with the lives and the blood of so many who have sacrificed for us to live free," Uran said.

During the observance, Uran asked viewers to take a moment of silence for former Crown Point Mayor James Forsythe, who died on April 8 from underlying health conditions.

Forsythe served in World War II and the Korean War and was the master of ceremonies for Crown Point's Memorial Day celebration.

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"He's been a mainstay of that ceremony for decades, and obviously being the mayor of Crown Point but then also serving in the military, he had a direct connection to what this weekend is all about," Uran previously told The Times.

## Gallery: Popular events canceled or postponed this year

### Gary SouthShore RailCats season



**When it would have happened:** May 22 (home opener)

**When the closure/postponement was announced:** April 21/June 12

**What we will miss:** After a virtual opening day on May 22 and hopes of playing a condensed season, the Gary SouthShore RailCats ultimately decided to suspend its 2020 operations. Only six teams from the American Association will play abbreviated schedules.

**Is it a done deal?:** Yes