

# VETERANS

## Day 2020



PHOTO BY JAKOB KOUNKEL  
A black granite monument is placed at the center of a Veterans Memorial in the city of Foley Oct. 30. The hand etching was performed by Allen Brisse, of Sauk Rapids, and engraving was completed by Ralph Katka, of Katka's Monuments, in rural Foley.

## Granite monument placed at

# Foley's Veterans Memorial

### Stone comes to life by hands of local craftsmen

BY NATASHA BARBER | STAFF WRITER

**F**OLEY – Over 5 tons of stone have been transformed into a symbol of honor this month by the hands of two Benton County men.

Ralph Katka, of Katka's Monuments in Foley, and Allen Brisse, of Sauk Rapids, spent portions of the last year preparing for an artistic undertaking that is sure to pay homage to the nation's military veterans for years to come.

The two were involved with the design and creation of the 8-by-4 black granite monument, its pedestal and six benches that were placed at the center of Foley's Veterans Memorial Oct. 29-30. The pieces, which are accompanied by nine flagpoles and flags, a concrete pathway and yet-to-be-placed statues, are the culmination of a yearlong project prompted by members of Foley American Legion Post 298. The memorial, located near Highway 23 and the Benton County Courts Administration building, will become a landmark within the city.

"It's a good thing to be part of," said Katka, who has worked in the granite industry for over 40 years. "My grandkids can say, 'Grandpa made that.' ... (The monument is) going to be there for a long, long time. It's something to be proud of."

Legion member and memorial organizer Gary Swanson approached Katka about being involved in the project, and Swanson could not be happier with the results.



PHOTO BY NATASHA BARBER

Allen Brisse, of Sauk Rapids, uses an air tool Oct. 13 to hand etch a granite stone that will be part of Foley's Veterans Memorial. The monument was crafted at Katka's Monuments in rural Foley.

"No matter what I threw at him, he said, 'We can do this,'" Swanson said. "He's been a great guy to work with. The piece is breathtaking."

Katka knows a thing or two about paying tribute to loved ones lost. After working in various facets of the granite industry in St. Cloud, Katka began his business on the homestead where he grew up in 1998. He specializes in headstone markers and takes pride in telling people's

stories on stone.

Katka said people can look at a marker without knowing someone and learn about that person by the etchings and designs incorporated into their memorial.

"Granite is so beautiful to me," Katka said. "I love it. ... You can take a blank piece of granite and it looks pretty, but it ain't nothing until you start putting some names, dates and carvings on it. That's what makes it happen."

But, the vision of the veterans monument was not Katka's alone. Legion members brought their ideas to Katka and Brisse, and the granite artists assisted in realizing the images.

The stone has two sides. On one side features six military insignia at the base – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. A WWII soldier, modern-day combat soldier, flag and bald eagle head surround the words, "Dedicated to all men and women who served honorably in our Armed Forces, and those serving today, preserving our freedom and protecting us and our nation world wide from all enemies."

On the reverse, a bugler calls over a field of military headstones where a young boy salutes. The words, "All gave some ... some gave all" and "Never forgotten" remind visitors of the price of war.

"That's the most touching image I've ever put on a veterans monument by far," said Brisse of the bugler and young boy. Brisse, a semi-retired artist who previously worked for Cold Spring Granite Company, has worked on multiple memorials throughout his career.

"It depicts the sadness of a war," he said. "I've never done anything close to that. There is so much to the image; it makes you want to cry."

The men spent many hours creating the design – the hand etching alone took nearly 10 days, not to mention the time to scale the images from a sheet of paper to the large slab.

"You're doing everything by hand; there's no quick machine," Katka said. "That's what makes it so beautiful and so unique – all the time that's spent on it."

Katka's portion of the project included sandblasting the lettering and military branch insignia.