

Group seeks funding, information for memorial

By Adam Smith

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A Gardendale group is moving ahead with plans to build a park honoring city residents who served their country. The Gardendale Beautification Commission has worked for two years to build the Gardendale Veterans Memorial Park, located in the 1200 block of Decatur Highway. The project will serve as an addition to the park that was built in the 1960s and dedicated in the mid-1980s. The current park features a cannon and anchor, in addition to a large granite marker. "We just felt like we wanted to upgrade the park and make it more aesthetically pleasing," said Gardendale Beautification Commission President Louie Pearson. "This will be an ongoing project and when this is done, we'll work on other areas of the park."

The project received help from the Jefferson County Commission earlier this year in the form of a \$15,000 check, but commission leaders are seeking additional funding to complete the \$30,000 project. As a way to raise more funds, the group is selling black granite bricks to residents who want to honor loved ones who have served in the military or were killed in the line of duty. The bricks, which will be used as part of the memorial park display, can have up to three lines of information and be purchased for \$30. The park display will also include a large center marker of black granite, measuring more than eight feet tall. The commission has worked with Richard Bradley of Laser Works Alabama to create the monument, which will also depict war scenes and the six seals of the nation's armed forces.

"We wanted to depict something that would be a centerpiece that would grab the attention of anyone coming by," Bradley said. "We knew it had to be something that would make someone want to stop and look at what's there."

The memorial park will also include five granite benches representing each major war involving American troops, including the current Mideast conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bradley said he was pleased to be a part of the project and hopes the park will help rejuvenate interest in the sacrifices made by men and women who served the country.

"We're starting to develop a history about Gardendale that most of us don't know about," he said. "As we lose members of the older generation, we're losing the history, so it's important that we document this in some way." Pearson said the group is looking for any information on Gardendale's war dead so they can be honored as part of the memorial. Pearson hopes other residents will come forward with information about Gardendale veterans or those killed in the line of duty.

"I've received three names, but I would think there would be more than that," he said. "Most of the responses have come from those killed during World War II."

In the current park, there is a marker for Jimmy Cain, killed in October 1983 in Beirut,

Lebanon, while on a peacekeeping mission. Work on the park will likely begin in late August or early September, Pearson said. Much of the work will be done by city employees. For more information on how to donate to the Veterans Memorial Park project or to purchase a brick, contact Pearson at 631-9804 or e-mail him at pearson915@msn.com.

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