

RESTORING MEMORIES

Young Mountain Top woman's mission to clean up veterans' headstones in area cemeteries grows into a community-wide endeavor.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Above, Crestwood High School football player Zach Sheloski cleans a headstone. Inset, Scott Hilenski, left, and Ava Groth, demonstrate the application of a D2 solution used to clean headstones.

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CORRESPONDENT

Thanks to the efforts of a young woman from Mountain Top and a cadre of volunteers, headstones and grave markers of cores of deceased veterans, some who served as far back as the Civil War, were cleaned just in time for Memorial Day.

More than 50 volunteers turned out on May 21 to participate in "Mission: Restoring Memories," a project to honor deceased veterans by cleaning their headstones at Albert Cemetery, St. Mary's Cemetery, and St. Martin-in-the-Fields Cemetery in Mountain Top.

The project was organized by Ava Groth, a member of the Mountain Top American Legion Junior Auxiliary Unit 781, with the assistance of her parents, Stacey Acri and Ed Groth, both U.S. Navy veterans, and American Legion Post 781 Auxiliary.

The Crestwood High School senior got the idea for restoring the veterans' grave markers when she participated in "Wreaths Across America"



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last year. At that time, she realized that not all graves got wreaths, and many seemed to be neglected. After thinking about that for a while, Groth came to the conclusion that there probably aren't family members around to take care of the graves of many older veterans.

So, with the help of her parents and the support of the community, Groth organized "Mission: Restoring Memories."

"I'm so excited and thankful for all those who showed up," Groth said as volunteers spread throughout Albert Cemetery armed with sprayers and brushes.

The Groths purchased several gallons of a solution known as D2 which is made specifically for cleaning headstones. Scott Hilenski, owner of Memento Mortuos LLC, a company that specializes in cleaning and restoration of headstones, demonstrated to

volunteers how to apply the solution. Hilenski is president of the Mountain Top Historical Society, which supported the project, and several society members participated. The project got underway with a group of volunteers with one-gallon sprayers who went through the cemetery spraying the solution on veterans' headstones. They were followed by others who used brushes to scrub the headstones. Hilenski noted the biological solution, once sprayed on the headstones, will continue to work on removing material for months after it is applied.

Among the volunteers were more than a dozen Crestwood High School football players who were the "scrubbers" for the project. Their participation in the project was part of the team's commitment to be a part of the Mountain Top community.

Mountain Top resident Joanne Dinoski, who participated in the cleanup along with her sister, Paula Woolfolk, commended Groth for her work to honor veterans. "I'm honored to be here today," Dinoski said. "This is such a wonderful project."



The Albert Cemetery Association Board on its Facebook page expressed its appreciation for the work of Groth and the volunteers.

"On behalf of the Albert Cemetery Association Board, we wanted to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to Ms. Ava Groth, the Mountain Top Historical Society, the American Legion Post 781, and countless members of the community for your hard work and passion on that incredibly warm day for caring, remembering, and respecting our communities' past and history by cleaning the cemetery monuments at the Albert Cemetery and other local cemeteries over the weekend," the board commented.

The grave markers included some deceased veterans who served with the Grand Army of the Republic in the Civil War; World War I, World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam War.