

‘The Response Was Overwhelming’

A VFW Post in Pennsylvania worked with its city to provide a viewing area for senior veterans during one of the country’s oldest Memorial Day parades

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Heralded as one of the oldest of its kind in the country, the Memorial Day parade in Doylestown, Pa., added a new feature to its longstanding tradition during its 155th annual event last year.

Spearheaded by VFW Post 175 to accommodate its senior veterans and those wheelchair-bound, a new seating area was designated to make it easier for them to attend the parade, which averages about 15,000 spectators per year.

“Prime viewing areas are occupied hours before the 10 a.m. start, and due to street closures, access to the parade route is challenging, as is nearby parking,” Post 175 Commander Steve Fischer said. “In the past, these circumstances have made it difficult for senior veterans, wheelchair-bound and/or those residing in area nursing homes to attend the parade.”

Fischer, who on behalf of Post 175 brought the idea to the Doylestown parade committee prior to the parade last year, left city hall pleased with the answer he had received.

“Doylestown Borough Parks and Facilities Department decided to set aside a prime viewing area for senior veterans and their families,” Fischer said. “They brought a 40-seat bleacher and two portable restrooms.”

The bleachers and portable bathrooms were set up along a stretch of the 1.5-mile route, which begins at the local high school and moves east and north and back east toward the Doylestown Cemetery, where it ends with a 30-minute memorial service, during which veterans of Doylestown place wreaths to honor their own.

In order to get the veterans to the designated seating area during the event, the parade committee also coordinated with Doylestown police and public works departments to allow

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shuttle and private vehicles carrying senior veterans to access an adjacent space designated for dropoff and parking.

“As this was the first time this was done, the Post decided not to fully promote the area but anticipated a larger crowd,” said Post 175 member and Senior Committee Chairman Michael Olenick. “We also received help from Doylestown American Legion Post 210 and their Legion youth baseball team, who set up 40 seats next to the bleachers provided by the borough.”

On Memorial Day, Post 175 members welcomed more than 60 senior veterans and their families into the private viewing area for prime seating along a leg of the 155th annual parade. As they sat down, Post members presented them with baseball caps that had their respective service embroidered on them.

With many of them coming from one of the eight local nursing homes in the area, Olenick added that their gratitude left an impression on him.

“The response was overwhelming,” Olenick said. “Other veterans groups during the parade would stop, face the bleachers and salute them. Emotions were very high. The senior veterans and family members who attended were most appreciative of this and were still talking about it and thanking us well after the event.”

To build on the success of the parade last year, Post 175 members plan on adding another element to the senior veterans viewing area for the upcoming 156th annual Doylestown Memorial Day parade on May 27.

They hope to enlarge the seating area to include disabled veterans, as well as providing a tent with snacks and refreshments and additional volunteers to help, since many Post members participate in the marching that takes place during the parade.

“We think this is a very important thing to continue to build upon,” Olenick said. “This parade honors those who gave their all for this country, and our senior veterans deserve to have the opportunity to pay their respects to them, some of whom were known to our senior veterans.”

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