

IBEW - NECA Help Restore Muskegon's Veterans Memorial Park

Muskegon's Veteran's Memorial Park has a long and rich history since it was first established November 11, 1934 as a major landmark. When this milestone was created it was known as "Michigan's Most Beautiful Mile." One of the reasons for such a memorial show piece, is the behind the scenes involvement of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 275 and the Michigan Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA). The involvement of IBEW 275/NECA is made possible by a partnership between the electrical trades and the Muskegon Northside Lions Club.

Much of the park requires electrical service and necessary upgrades and members and retirees of IBEW 275/NECA donate the labor to make sure the electrical work is done and up to code. IBEW 275 supplies the manpower, Michigan NECA helps secure the necessary tools and equipment, and the Muskegon Northside Lion's Club obtains donations to purchase the materials.



From left to right, retirees Roy Bartos, Eddie Bouwman, Bob Laban, and Ray Wiseman get ready for their work day at Muskegon's Veterans Memorial Park.

Much of the upgrading process started back in the mid 1970s when the VFW and American Legion felt the Park had lacked proper care and decided to take action in refurbishing it. They and others in the community formed the "Save Our Veterans Memorial Park Committee," in order to put the necessary time and materials into upgrading the Park.



Ray Wiseman, back to camera, overseeing Tim Streit unloading a trencher provided by Newkirk Electric of Muskegon. The trencher is used to lay power lines at Muskegon's Veterans Memorial Park.

The Committee enlisted financial support from the city of Muskegon and Muskegon County municipalities in what became a bicentennial restoration project, with the city donating about \$60,000, and the county kicking in another \$25,000. Since the 70s, a dike-and-pumping operation was installed and new granite monuments bearing the names of those who died not only in World Wars I & II, but later in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts as well wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

John Belasco, owner of Belasco Electric in Muskegon and member of IBEW 275 does much of the current planning, gets the permits, purchases the necessary supplies and materials, and coordinates the work. Newkirk Electric of Muskegon also provided various equipment that is necessary to complete the project.

The electrical upgrades are being pursued in four phases. First an electrical services building had to be constructed which includes the necessary master electrical components that headquarter all the electrical service in the Park. Then the south end of the park was energized by constructing essential electrical service including rebuilding the electrical infrastructure and installing timers, pedestals and lighting. The third and fourth phases are yet to be finished but include finishing electrical construction at the north end of the Park and the Park's island area as well as working with the Michigan Department of Transportation for paving and finishing up by improving the Park's overall lighting.

IBEW 275 members who have worked on refurbishing Veteran's Memorial Park include retiree's Roy Bartos, Jack Kramer, George Robinson, Bill Chappell, Jacque Crevier, Steve Marshall, Eddie Bouwman, Ray Wiseman, Bob Laban, and Bob Harkness. Active journeymen include Lenny Petznic, Manny Sahagun, Dave Kitchen, Tim Streit, and Jeff Engel. Apprentices Nate Sterling, Rueben Cortez, Matt Dudek, Jason Lowe, Christian Vorgias, Bryce Butler, Nicholas Rake, Nate Kingsley, Brian Flanery, and Brandon Briggs have also contributed numerous hours on the project.



A volunteer work team of Roy Bartos, Bud Fox (brother-in-law to Roy Bartos), Jack Kramer, Bill Chappell, Jeff Engel, Jacque Crevier, Lenny Petznic, Steve Marshall, Manny Sahagun, Dave Kitchen, Eddie Bouwman, Ray Wiseman, Matt Dudek, Jason Lowe, Ruben Cortez getting ready for their day at the Muskegon Veterans Memorial Park.



From left to right, apprentices Jason Lowe and Bill Chappell work with Training Director Dave Kitchen on installing an electrical pedestal at Muskegon's Veterans Memorial Park.

The Veteran's Memorial Park was first dedicated to the soldiers who fought in World War I. In 2009, it marked its 75th anniversary as a memorial to all who served in the nation's armed forces, whether living or dead. The Park itself is on a 50 acre site.

IBEW 275/NECA members also volunteer their time for Muskegon's Summer Celebration, Irish Festival, Shoreline Celebration and United Way. IBEW 275/NECA is a major supporter of "Helmets to Hardhats," a program that assists service persons returning from active duty into the workforce. A significant percentage of veterans make up IBEW 275/NECA membership, as well as other union labor/management organizations in the United States.

The Muskegon Northside Lions Club continues to take donations in support of Veterans Memorial Park. Tax deductible donations can be made to the Veteran's Park Improvement fund, Community Foundation for Muskegon County, 425 W. Western Ave., Suite 200, Muskegon, MI 49440. Questions about the Veterans Park Improvement Fund can be directed to Dave Eling, Director, Muskegon County Department of Veterans Affairs at 231-724-7143.

Its organizations like the Lions Club, VFW, American Legion, Vietnam Veterans Chapter 31 and IBEW/NECA that let all veterans of Muskegon County know how much the citizenry thanks them for their service to our country.