

Wall honors heroes

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MT. VERNON — The Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance was erected Saturday at Mt. Vernon Airport to honor veterans and first responders who gave their lives in the fight against terrorism.

U.S. Marine Veteran Derek Hendershot, who drove the wall to Mt. Vernon and oversaw its assembly, said the memorial promotes healing and ensures our nation's heroes are never forgotten. The wall, he said, takes on special resonance with the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"It's remembering our veterans but most of all out of this one it's remembering our first responders who ran into those buildings and didn't come back, they didn't think twice, they just went and helped," Hendershot said.

HOOAH Hunt for Heroes helped arrange for the wall to be brought to Mt. Vernon. It was on display at the airport until Monday evening and a special ceremony was held Sunday to present the memorial and recognize Gold Star Families.

Tom Gaither, a HOOAH volunteer, said he was proud to see the wall come to Mt. Vernon. He said he's spoken to Gold Star Mothers and their biggest fear is that their loved ones will be forgotten.

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U.S. Marine Veteran Derek Hendershot

"This wall makes sure that doesn't happen," Gaither said Saturday. "So hopefully people will come out that are veterans, get to see that their friends are still with us, that they're still being kept on a wall and they're not forgotten."

The Wall of Remembrance was created by U.S. Marine David Brown and Patriot Richard "JR" Nichols for the 10-year remembrance of the attacks on 9/11. The memorial was first displayed on Sept. 11, 2011, and was made of 29 panels that were 6 feet high and 3 feet wide, with a full color timeline on one side from 1983 to August 2011 and the names on the other side of those who were lost on 9/11 and U.S. military fallen from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since that time, three new panels have been added. The memorial now includes about 11,000 names of those honored, Hendershot said, and is 115-by-6-feet in size.

Hendershot said the wall has been to many places but this was its first time in Mt. Vernon.

"It was only meant to go up once and it's been up 86 times," he said.

The wall was ushered into Mt. Vernon Saturday morning by the Illinois Patriot Guard Riders, along with local police and fire personnel. The panels were then put together at the airport by a group of volunteers.

The volunteers came from numerous agencies, including HOOAH, the Elks, Mt. Vernon Fire Department, VFW, Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency, and others.

Elks member Amanda McNear, who also volunteers with HOOAH and Jefferson County EMA, said it's a blessing for the wall to come to Southern Illinois, especially during the week of remembrance for 9/11.

"9/11 is an event that many of us have that is sealed within our hearts and our memories and this wall being here is something that we can look at and (it) kind of gives us a little bit of hope in this day and age that we live in," McNear said.

Honoring first responders



Travis Morse photos/Register-News

Brad Bridgeman of Mt. Vernon takes a picture of the Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance Saturday at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. The wall, which honors veterans and first responders, will be on display at the airport until Monday evening.

Volunteers pitched in Saturday morning to assemble the Global War on Terror Wall of Remembrance at Mt. Vernon Airport. The wall, honoring veterans and first responders, was on display until Monday evening.

