

Sharon man adds to his tribute to fallen soldiers

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By Chris Schultz

SHARON - Remembering those who have fallen in the war against terror has become a second job for Chet Borowski.

Borowski's full-time job is that of psychotherapist and case manager for Jefferson County. But now, for two or three hours a day, he's on the Internet, scouring news and government Web sites for the names of people who have died in service.

Early in the summer of 2003, Borowski created a memorial for people who died in the Iraq War.

It started with a rock that had the number of deaths painted on it. But Borowski wanted to do more.

He set up a simple black plywood panel, about 8 feet tall and about 4½ feet wide. On it, he began stapling lists of the names of those who had been killed.

A year ago, he started his second panel with 375 names listed.

Since then, the memorial has grown larger. There are now four panels, each with about 400 names and pictures. The panels are flanked by purple mums.

Borowski is preparing a fifth panel.

As of Oct. 6, 1,457 soldiers from 19 countries and the United States have died in connection with military action in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

One soldier, Keith M. Maupin of Batavia, Ohio, is officially listed as missing, since he was taken prisoner by Iraqi insurgents in April.

Now officially called The Coalition Memorial, the four panels, covered by the names of people who have died and marked by the flags of the coalition forces, stand at the end of his driveway in the town of Sharon at 1190 Peters Road. Spotlights illuminate the memorial at night.

Agree or disagree with the war in Iraq, the men and women who volunteered to serve their countries, and who died while in service, need to be remembered, Borowski said.

"I am humbled by the sacrifice," he said. "So many men and women joined (the military) post 9/11.

"People joined out of patriotism."

The coalition has caught the attention of others. Elizabeth Cortez of Escondido, Calif., sent her thanks for the memorial to her brother-in-law, Sgt. Henry Ybarra III.

Borowski's number of coalition deaths may be slightly higher than the official counts that are on television news and official dispatches. That's because the memorial counts all military deaths, whether in the combat zone or behind the lines.

So, included with Pat Tillman, the former professional football player and Army Ranger who died in a firefight in Afghanistan, is the name of Samuel J. Bruss of Kenosha, who died of an undiagnosed heart ailment while in Marine training in San Diego.

According to Bruss' family, the young man joined the Marines wanting to defend his country against terrorism.

"To me, he counted," Borowski said of Bruss.

Two British soldiers who served in Iraq, went home on leave and committed suicide are on the memorial.

And so are the names of some of the 62 Spanish soldiers who were killed in a plane crash in Turkey last year on their way to Iraq. It's a tragedy that few in the United States heard of and probably was a major factor in Spain's decision to withdraw from Iraq this year, Borowski said.

Flags posted by the memorial represent the United States, Britain, Spain, Italy, Canada, Norway, Poland, Australia, Estonia, El Salvador, Romania, Thailand, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Germany and the Philippines.

Except for the Philippines, all have lost soldiers in either Iraq or Afghanistan, Borowski said. The Philippines are included because earlier this year, the United States and the Philippines conducted joint military operations against al-Qaida cells in that country.

This summer, Borowski's friends and others who support his memorial, urged him to create something more mobile.

With the help of members from the Masonic Lodge in Delavan, who donated funds and labor, a trailer-mounted memorial was created. The traveling Coalition Memorial, also made of four black panels, is topped by the flags of the coalition nations involved in the war against terrorism.

The traveling memorial debuted in the July 4 parade in Delavan and stood at the Delavan Municipal Building for 30 days. It was also in the Darien Corn Fest parade.

Borowski estimate as many as 7,500 people saw the traveling memorial.

The memorial is scheduled to be in the Christmas parade in Elkhorn on Dec. 4. And next Memorial Day, the Coalition Memorial will be set up next to the traveling Vietnam War Memorial in Woodstock, Ill., Borowski said.

Although still made of plywood and covered with names printed on laminated paper, Borowski has improved his memorial over the past year. The panels are now supported by wood and metal frames that can hold up against the winter winds. And the laminate is more durable, able to withstand snow and driving rains.

Borowski wants his memorial to be more than just some panels on a parcel of land. He is also looking for the mailing addresses of the immediate families of people who have died.

As the mother of one fallen soldier noted, war takes soldiers, and soldiers come from families.

The memorial card on the front has the red and white stripes and blue field of Old Glory, but the field is dominated by a single gold star, the symbol of sacrifice.

Inside is a picture of the memorial and the words: "A peaceful place exists where your loved one will be remembered and respected for eternity. They are not gone, who live in the hearts of others."

He is sending out the cards, starting with families in Wisconsin. It's slow going, and only about half of the 26 Wisconsin families have been reached, he said. But once the Wisconsin families are contacted, Borowski plans to send cards to families in Illinois and then start working out eastward and westward.

And he has dreams of a more permanent memorial.

"I look at this and think, 'My God, it's just paper and plywood,'" Borowski said. "I want to get this in granite."

Borowski said he's now looking at a more accessible place for a truly permanent memorial. He has his eye on a patch of ground that is part of a public park in Darien.

And Darien has expressed some interest, although everything is preliminary, Borowski said.

That part of the park was once a rest stop for soldiers traveling from Chicago to Madison, Borowski said.

"Somehow, that seems appropriate," he said.