

Veterans, patriotism to be showcased in this year's Alton Memorial Day Parade

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Alton has the oldest Memorial Day Parade in the country with this year being the 150th parade in 149 years.

Alton Township Supervisor Don Huber works on the parade with the East End Improvement Association. He said he has helped the Upper Alton Business Association with the event for about 15 years, after big box stores Walgreens and CVS took the place of five small businesses in Upper Alton. Neither assists with the parade, Huber said, but he said it does receive much-needed assistance from the Alton Optimists Club, which sends volunteers each year to manage the parade staging.

Unlike the Halloween Parade, which is another large city-wide event rooted in Alton's history created by the East End Improvement Association, there is no judging involved with the Memorial Day Parade. Instead, the parade is meant to have a sharp focus on the reason behind the holiday - those who sacrificed their lives with the intent of keeping Americans safe and free.

"It's pretty much concentrated on the veterans," Huber said. "The focus belongs on them. It's a good old tradition in Alton, and we advertise it as the oldest one in the country. We've been doing it since 1868. It's our 150th one this year, and we've been doing it for 149 years."

This year's parade grand marshal is Cecil Wade, a Vietnam War veteran who just recently received his Purple Heart for injuries he sustained during his service.

As usual, the parade will start at 10 a.m. this Monday from its staging area at Alton Middle School, located at 2200 College Ave., and it will continue east toward Washington before turning south onto Edwards, back east toward Main, onto College again and ultimately to the Alton City Cemetery by way of Elizabeth Street.

Once the parade reaches its conclusion, a ceremony for the fallen will be held at the cemetery.

Huber said his wife's family used to live in Upper Alton near the parade route. While they have since moved, he said they still sit at the same corner every year to watch the parade as it passes - a tradition held in a similar fashion by many longtime Altonians.