

Grafton's National Memorial of Military Ascent Dedication Ceremony Scheduled for This Weekend

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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GRAFTON - The National Memorial of Military Ascent will be officially dedicated this weekend.

On Saturday, June 6, 2026, community members are invited to the NMMA site at the Grafton Visitors Center to celebrate the completion of the project's first phase. The dedication ceremony begins at 9:30 a.m. on June 6. Grafton Mayor Mike Morrow, who has spearheaded the project, expressed his excitement to see it coming to fruition, adding that the statues have already been installed and look beautiful.

"It's absolutely breathtaking as you go by it. They look realistic, life-like," he said.

The NMMA is modeled after Point du Hoc. This D-Day scene is replicated with 500-pound bronze statues of soldiers climbing up the Grafton bluffs.

On June 6, there will be no parking onsite. Parking at Raging Rivers opens at 6:30 a.m. The Band of Brothers motorcycle group will be present to help people park and load onto the free shuttles, and they will be transported to the NMMA location.

Morrow encourages people to "get there early," as there will be several military vehicles to explore, organized by the Second Ranger Battalion and the Commemorative Air Force.

At 9:30 a.m., Ojibwe community members will provide the posting of the colors. Chaplain Warren Gohl, a Vietnam veteran, will offer an invocation. American Legion Post 648 and VFW Post 805 will show their support with an honor guard, a 21-gun salute and the playing of "Taps." There will be several speeches from dignitaries and commission members.

"It's going to be a great, packed morning," Morrow said.

After the ceremony, attendees are encouraged to visit Grafton and enjoy the day. At 1 p.m., the Band of Brothers group will lay a wreath at the memorial as part of their first annual run, with 60% of profits from the run going to the NMMA every year.

There will be a 1940s-themed gala that evening at The Loading Dock. Though tickets are sold out, Morrow still hopes people will support the event or stop by the Second Ranger Battalion's encampment nearby to view their displays on World War II and Point du Hoc.

Morrow, a veteran himself, explained that he has visited Omaha Beach and Point du Hoc several times. One day in 2019, his wife pointed out that the Grafton bluffs looked similar to the Point du Hoc scene.

When Morrow became mayor in 2021, he ran on three campaign promises. One of these promises was to find a way to honor Grafton's veteran population, which is the highest per capita in Illinois. The City Council created a commission, and they worked together to fundraise for the NMMA vision.

Morrow remembers "the little old lady" who handed him a \$5 bill, which he found just as touching and important as the "transformational" donation of \$2.5 million by Jayne and John Simmons. Altogether, the memorial's fundraising efforts totaled about \$3.5 million.

"I want to thank everybody who has had a part in supporting us, donating money, from \$5 all the way up to \$2.5 million," Morrow said. "You're all part of this wonderful, wonderful project."

They worked with Carolina Bronze to create the statues, and Thom Bell has documented the entire process with a film crew so a full-length documentary can eventually premiere in local theaters. Morrow is excited to transition to phase two of the project, which will focus on transforming the Grafton Visitors Center and Museum to feature more information about Grafton's veteran population.

In the meantime, he hopes Riverbend residents from across the area come out on June 6 to support the NMMA and celebrate its dedication. The ceremony will also be livestreamed at The Loading Dock and in France, and Morrow has spoken to a family coming from California whose father climbed Point du Hoc in WWII.

"It's an international draw already," he shared.

For more information about the National Memorial of Military Ascent, visit the [official website](#).