



## How will their garden grow?

— By Libby Cluett

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Transforming a field into a field of dreams has been the ongoing objective of the National Vietnam War Museum, as witnessed by vets and civilians last Saturday morning at the formal dedication of the Meditation Garden.

Wielding enormous scissors, NVWM board officers Richard Gaurkee and Jim Messinger officially cut the ribbon to the garden, allowing the public to enjoy the most recent fruits of their physical and fundraising labor.

In Gaurkee's dedication address, he cited that by 1997, the idea of "building a forum dedicated to the understanding of the era" of the Vietnam War had started to take shape.

"It is only fitting that we stand here this morning to cut the ribbon on the first phase of that forum, the Meditation Garden of the NVWM, just five days after the whole nation stopped to remember those who had given the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of this country," Gaurkee added.

Prior to the ribbon cutting, members of the Mineral Wells Area Chamber of Commerce presented a \$5,000 check - a la publisher's clearinghouse size - for the Labyrinth Trail portion of the garden.

The Meditation Garden sits on the 12-acre museum site, located east of Mineral Wells along the south side of U.S. Highway 180 East, immediately west of the Lake Mineral Wells Trailway bridge. It was designed and planted by members of the Parker County Master Gardener Association as a place where veterans, their families and friends and the general public can gather in peace and serenity.

In landscape design, a meditation garden implies a sense of seclusion and personal space and can become a place where one can relax, reflect, unwind, ponder new ideas, and contemplate in peace and quiet.

While a visitor to the garden has many pathway options, those who embark on the Labyrinth Trail might find themselves on a meditative journey to the center and out the other side. Like labyrinths from the middle ages - designed for pilgrims to walk through as part of their spiritual journey - the trail's layout encourages people to slow down and engage in the path, focusing on the present and the aesthetics of the journey rather than a destination.

Bordering the decomposed granite path of the labyrinth are spiraling beds where Mexican feather grass and four-nerve daisies are starting to take root. The entire garden is a showcase of plants that thrive in this climate, from cedar elms and bur oaks to salvia greggii and Texas Sage.

Gaurkee thanked what seemed to be an army of people for their work, time, donations, funds and such. He presented a special recognition plaque to Jim and Lola Messinger for their hard work and dedication to build this meditative forum. Lola, a member of the Parker County Master Gardener Association, was project coordinator with Karen Brown for the planting project. Jim Messinger wears many hats overseeing the projects and activities at the site.

Encouraging people to donate to the entire NVWM cause, Gaurkee said, "If you look at the design and workmanship of this garden, you will get an idea of the quality of the product we are trying to build. You can see your money will not be wasted."

Reminding participants that, "If you like what you see here today, stop these hardworking people and thank them for their effort, these are good people."

The Meditation Garden is the first of six memorial gardens planned for the museum campus. The next two gardens, Contemplation and Vietnam Memorial Gardens, will be followed by the Reflection Garden, Memorial Garden and Remembrance Garden.

According to Messinger, planning for the next garden has begun. It will surround the replica of the Camp Holloway Memorial Wall that is currently being constructed. The wall is based on the original that became a symbol of the many combat aviation battalion members stationed at Camp Holloway, in Pleiku, South Vietnam, who lost their lives before and during the Vietnam War.

Additionally, the museum will soon provide paved access from the Lake Mineral Wells Trailway. Messinger is working with state park officials and a contractor to plan and build the path.

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## Photos



Richard Gaurkee, left, presents Lola and Jim Messinger with a plaque honoring them for their efforts in fundraising and bringing to fruition the Meditation Garden at the National Vietnam War Museum site during Saturday's ceremony.



Some of the garden's first visitors tour one of the many pathways during a recent visit.



One display Saturday was a restored and fully functional TH-55A training helicopter, like those that once flew over Mineral Wells and the area when Fort Wolters served as a major training facility for pilots during the Vietnam War.