

Cooperative members honor the fallen

By Emily Baer

ON THE outskirts of the Flight 93 National Memorial along Route 30 in Somerset County is an emotionally moving, newly constructed, 10-acre memorial known as Patriot Park.

Patriot Park is a place to honor the sacrifices made by service men and women of the United States military, who fought in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

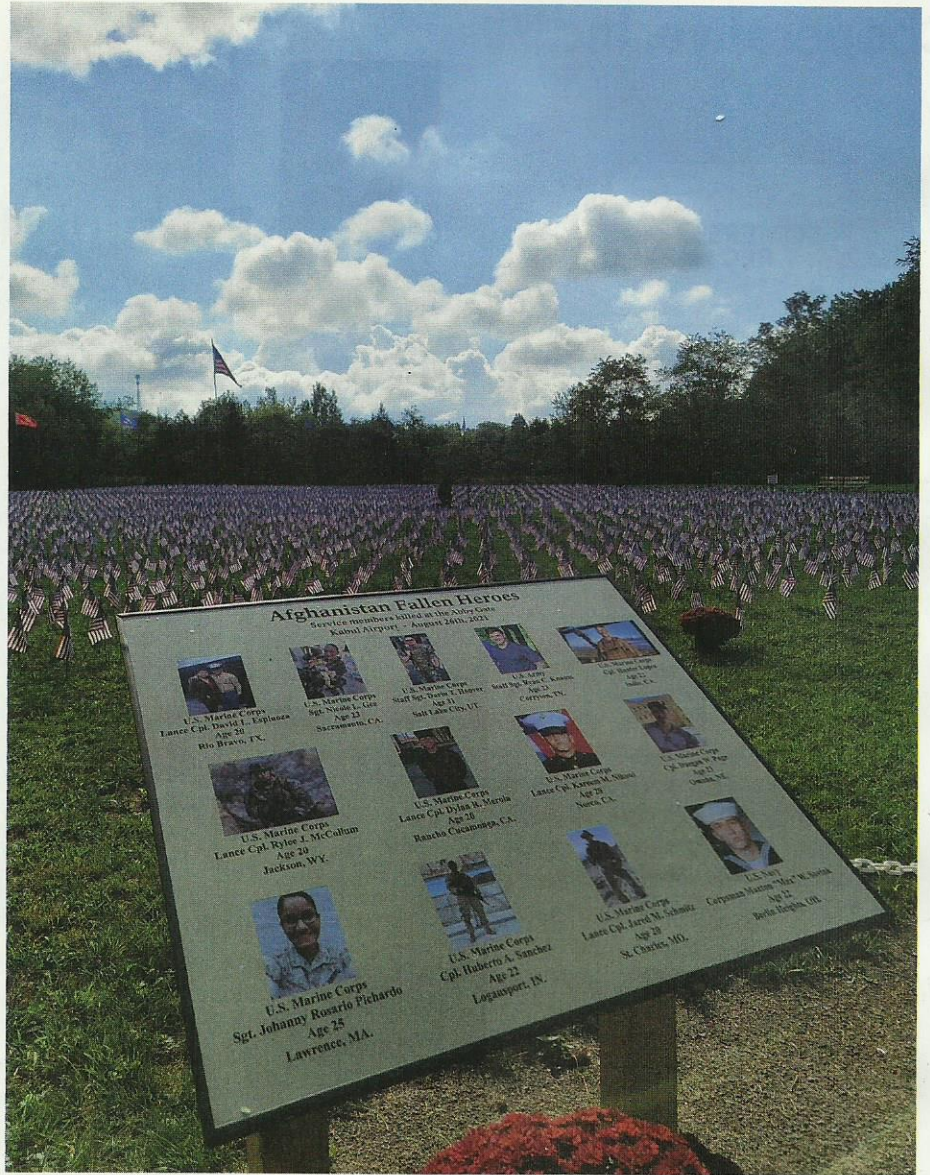
One month after the acts of terrorism on Sept. 11, 2001, former President George W. Bush stated, “The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st century — a war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them.”

Twenty years later, we are still fighting this war.

Since the initial Sept. 11, 2001 attack, millions of Americans have served in the military in the effort to rid the world of terrorism. Thousands



AMERICAN FLAGS: More than 7,000 American flags are on display to honor the American service men and women who died after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.



FIELD OF HEROES: This is one of many storyboards that detail the courage and sacrifice of local veterans who lost their lives while fighting in the Global War on Terror.

have lost their lives, and many more have suffered severe and debilitating injuries. Patriot Park is designed as a place to remember those who served and to express our gratitude.

From a vision that started more than six years ago, Patriot Park has evolved into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that was established on Sept. 14, 2015. The park opened to the public and started welcoming visitors on Sept. 3, 2021. Because of its proximity, Patriot Park is a great additional stop when visiting the

Flight 93 National Memorial.

As you walk the short, manicured trail through the woods into the park, you will start to see some flags. The Field of Heroes holds more than 7,000 American flags, each representing an American service man or woman who died serving during the last 20 years, including the 13 souls recently taken in Kabul. Storyboards stand in front of the Field of Heroes, sharing the stories of local veterans and giving some background and detail about just a few

Randall Musser P.E., P.L.S. President - Founder, Musser Engineering, Inc.
 Robert E. Sembower - Vice President - Brigadier General, U.S. Army - retired
 Clair Gill - Treasurer - Major General, U.S. Army - retired
 Donald Newman - Secretary - LT, U.S. Navy - veteran
 Robert Munhall - Colonel, U.S. Army - retired
 Travis Pheanis - Executive Director, National Ranger Association
 Bill Williams - President Patriot Productions
 Patrick Terlingo - Former Superintendent North Star School District
 Kathy Walker - Gold Star Mother
 G. Henry Cook - Chairman of the Board, Somerset Trust Company
 Duane Hart - Brigadier General, United States Air Force - retired
 David Berkey - President, Berkey Excavating Company, Inc.

PATRIOT PARK DIRECTORS: The Patriot Park Foundation Board of Directors is a group of co-op members, retired military personnel and business owners in the community. The group makes decisions that pay tribute to the service members who lost their lives in the ongoing Global War on Terror.

of the lives the flags behind the boards represent.

According to U.S. Department of Defense figures, more than 7,000 lives have been lost and more than 50,000 service members have been injured in the war on terror.

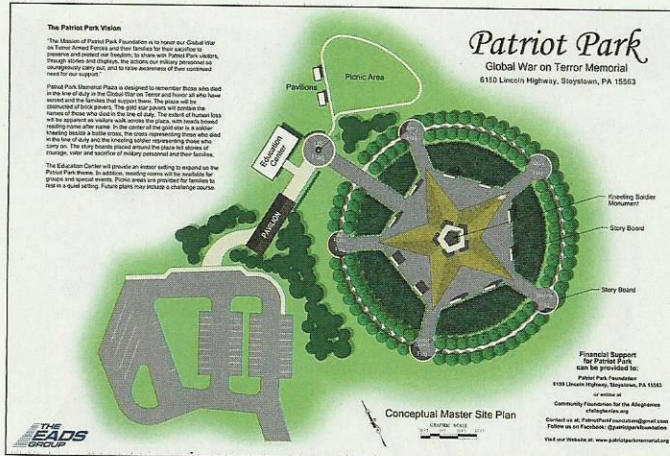
"I think it is very moving and important to realize that each flag represents a service man or woman lost by the U.S. military," says cooperative member Randall Musser, founder and president of the Patriot Park Foundation.

The foundation consists of a board of directors whose members make decisions about Patriot Park. These directors are cooperative members, retired military personnel and business

owners in our community.

As specified in its bylaws, the Patriot Park Foundation's specific purpose is to achieve the following:

- ▶ **HONOR** those who gave the ultimate sacrifice, as well as all veterans of the global war on terror.
- ▶ **INSPIRE** patriotism through stories and military displays.
- ▶ **EDUCATE** visitors about the GWOT and the sacrifices service personnel and their families have made and continue to make.
- ▶ **SUPPORT** the unique needs of the GWOT veterans and their families by partnering with other organizations that provide support services.
- ▶ **ENHANCE** the experience for



VISION: Patriot Park's future site plan includes an education center, a kneeling soldier monument in a five-star memorial, and a picnic area with pavilions.

the large number of people who visit the nearby Flight 93 National Memorial.

"We hope that we inspire all who visit the park to honor our fallen and their families through patriotism and by helping us continue to share their bravery and stories with the world," says Katlin Rodriguez, the park's media advisor.

In the coming years, the Patriot Park Foundation plans to expand and build a more permanent memorial where visitors can pay their respects. These plans include a Gold Star Plaza, made from bricks engraved with the name of each fallen service member during the war on terrorism, an education center, and a picnic area. Currently, the foundation is also seeking partnerships with businesses, other foundations, and service organizations, such as the American Legion, Eagles, Lions clubs, and VFW posts.

Patriot Park will be closing in mid-November for the winter and will reopen in late April or early May 2022. Normal operating hours are 9 a.m. to dusk. If interested in visiting, please go their website, patriotparkfoundation.org, or their social media pages, Facebook — Patriot Park Foundation and Instagram [patriotpark_foundation](https://www.instagram.com/patriotpark_foundation), for current operating hours.

A short video about Patriot Park can also be found on YouTube at youtu.be/_MpuNIC6j18.

