

Memorial Day celebrates those who died while serving *Oak Hill Park ceremony does veterans proud*

by Dolores Fox Ciardelli – Danville Express

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Those who gave their lives serving their country were remembered Monday morning at Oak Hill Park in Danville, in a ceremony organized by the Viet Nam Veterans of Diablo Valley and the All Wars Memorial Foundation.

About 600 folks gathered near the lake and on the sloping hill to hear the Danville Community Band, see the presentation of the colors, and listen to moving speeches under the clear blue sky.

Memorial Day was started after the Civil War, said keynote speaker Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Menard Jr., of the 49th Military Police Brigade from Fairfield, to remember the dead from a war where brother fought brother, and at first was called Decoration Day.

"It is not a day of mourning but a day of celebration," he said, adding that as Memorial Day weekend launches the summer season, so we must remember those who gave their lives for our country as being full of warmth and life.

"Their lives were dedicated not to conflict but to compassion and life," Menard said.

He told the stories of four "brothers" he'd fought beside, who were ready to give their last full measure to their country. He also noted that many thousands have no one to remember them and challenged everyone in the audience to find one such dead veteran, learn their story and share it.

Retired Army Major Gen. Ron Lowe read out the names of the local veterans who died during the last year, including Lance Cpl. Joshua "Chachi" Corral, a San Ramon Valley High grad who was killed in Afghanistan on Nov. 18, whose family was in attendance. A memorial in his honor at the Veterans Building in downtown Danville will be dedicated June 23, announced Mayor Candace Andersen.

The Memorial Day Celebration included a flyby of a P-51 Mustang fighter plane, and introductions of each branch of the service as its flag was presented, the Danville Community Band played its song and members stood for recognition.

This was the 20th year for the Viet Nam Veterans of Diablo Valley to hold its Memorial Day celebration at Oak Hill Park; it was previously held at the Oakland Coliseum.





