

## MTSU breaks ground on veterans memorial

Middle Tennessee State University officials broke ground on the future site of a permanent memorial to military veterans Saturday, Nov. 10, at the Tom H. Jackson Building (formerly the Alumni Building) during a day of festivities



Don Witherspoon, Maj. Chuck Giles, Dr. Robb McDaniel, Dr. Derek Frisby, U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, John Harris, and Dr. Andrei Korobkov attend the groundbreaking.

to acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices of military personnel.

The memorial will honor MTSU faculty, students, staffers and administrators who served their country in the United States armed forces from the university's inception in 1911 to the present and beyond. It will be a living memorial constructed in the form of a plaza that can be used equally well for classroom instruction, formal ceremonies or private contemplation.

With representatives of the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs and numerous veterans in attendance, Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, MTSU President, noted, "I think this project is particularly important today, as we are a nation at war, and these men and women are providing sacrifice that we can enjoy the freedom that so many around the world do not have."

U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, an MTSU alumnus, observed that society must demonstrate that it will honor veterans of the past if it expects to have defenders in the future.

"No matter what new weapons systems might be created, the most important weapon in our arsenal is always going to be the men and women in uniform," Gordon said.

Dr. Robb McDaniel, MTSU Veterans Committee Chairman and associate professor of political science, traced the project's origins from the inspiration of another associate professor of political science, Dr. Andrei Korobkov. It was his mission to memorialize Ken Ballard and Pierre Piche, two MTSU students who died in Iraq.

"I had known both of these students very well—Ken as a gregarious advisee with an infectious grin who seemed to

know everyone, and Pierre as a mature and very likable “A” student who I could always rely upon in class for reasoned commentary,” McDaniel said.

From this idea, a committee was formed, fundraising efforts were undertaken and an architect was assigned to create a permanent place for the acknowledgement of the veterans’ sacrifice. With \$5000 in seed money from the MTSU Foundation, the grass roots effort grew to a total of about \$45,000.

At today’s groundbreaking, John Harris of Orlando, Fla., a 1974 graduate of MTSU who served 20 years as an officer in the U.S. Army, brought the total up to \$65,000 with his generous donation.

“I think the theme today is ‘remember history,” said Harris, the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer of Acameca LLC. “I think it’s so important . . . , because we are a volunteer Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, that young people understand what it took to get us here and maybe what it takes to keep us where we are.”

Dr. Derek Frisby, assistant professor of history and Desert Storm veteran, spoke as the major researcher and compiler of information about the members of the MTSU community who are the focus of the memorial.

“During my research for this memorial, I realized that the most common of virtues among those in the MTSU community was something I came to call the MTSU or Blue Raider spirit of service, an uncommonly strong devotion to service and self-sacrifice,” Frisby said. “And perhaps no group embodies that Blue Raider spirit of service more than our veteran alumni.”

The memorial plan designed by Garry Askew of Bauer/Askew Architecture Pllc. of Nashville was displayed on easels at the site. The configuration includes a bipartite gray granite wall with a polished base. The names of the deceased will be featured on the north side. The south side will display a constellation of stars on one section. On the opposite section, the words “To Support and Defend the Constitution” will be engraved.

Brick pavers, many featuring the names of family members and other loved ones who served their country, will be arrayed in rows between the wall and the Jackson Building, flanked on either side with benches and emblems of the branches of the armed services. Proceeds from the ongoing sale of the pavers will go toward funding the memorial.

A honed gray granite circle inscribed with the MTSU seal will be situated between the pavers and the Jackson Building. It will be aligned with a polished gray granite podium to be used by professors during class lectures or speakers at special ceremonies. A flagpole aligned with the podium will be placed behind the wall.

The members of the MTSU Veterans Memorial Committee are: Robb McDaniel, Andrei Korobkov, Derek Frisby, Rebecca Fischer, Maj. Chuck Giles, Tony Johnston, Robyn Kilpatrick, Gina Logue, Melissa Osburn, Russell Parman, Anne Sloan, Hilary Stallings, Michelle Stepp, Justin Wax, Don Witherspoon and Brenda Wunder.

To date, the committee has collected the names of some 60 members of the university community killed in the line of duty. To bring more names to the committee’s attention, contact Frisby at 615-494-8856 or dfrisby@mtsu.edu. For more information, go to <http://www.mtsu.edu/veterans>.

Tax-deductible contributions to the memorial can be made by mail to MTSU Veterans Memorial Fund, c/o MTSU Foundation, P.O. Box 109, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN 37132. On-line donations can be made at <http://www.mtsu.edu/~devofc/giving.html>. Information about automatic bank drafts also is available on the Web site. To donate by phone with Visa or MasterCard, call 615-898-2502 or 1-877-444-6878.