

Letter to the Editor: Roxana HS Class of '66 to Dedicate Bench

by Patricia Weir
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ROXANA - Most of us have heard and understand the term “Gold Star Family.” It’s a family who has lost a son or daughter on the battlefield. If there was a “Gold Star High School Class,” surely Roxana High School Class of 1966 would qualify.

During the ravages of the undeclared War in Vietnam, our class didn’t lose merely one classmate, although that would have been very alarming. We didn’t lose two classmates. Or even three classmates. From a high school class of around 200 students, we lost four classmates on the battlefield in Vietnam. Those students are Wayne Carnell, Terry Dallape, Bill Peyton, and Duke Mason.

These four young, patriotic individuals, full of life and full of potential with their lives ahead of them, were taken from us in a most violent way. Not one of them knew that he had seen his homeland for the last time when he deployed. When he said goodbye to his family, he couldn’t know that would be the final loving embrace of his life. They were

lost to their families, to us, their classmates, and to this community on foreign soil. Not one had the opportunity to enjoy a rich and fulfilling life as most of the rest of us have enjoyed.

The Class of 1966 has bonded together, perhaps more so than is typical of other classes. In my opinion, this is due to the very disturbing and confusing shared experience of the Vietnam War. For many years, when our class gets together for various reunions and parties, we display posters of “Our Four Guys” along with the National Vietnam War Memorial Wall rubbings of each name. We, as a group, remember and share with others who remember them, how each one touched our lives.

Now, we are in our late seventies and beginning to feel our own sense of mortality. We, as a group, wish to honor “Our Four Guys” in perpetuity at the place where we all knew them: on the campus of Roxana High School. We wanted to leave behind something tangible and respectful for others to appreciate how deeply the undeclared Vietnam War touched the Class of 1966. Perhaps younger generations will take a lesson from the Vietnam War’s very damaging history. Perhaps they will grasp its real life consequences as they contemplate the individual engravings on the memorial bench.

Through the amazing generosity of the men and women of the Class of 1966 and the South Roxana American Legion, we are able to honor “Our Four Guys” with a beautiful jet black granite bench. Each name, military rank, and military insignia is etched thereon. The many brave veterans of the Class of 1966 will be honored and recognized at the same ceremony. We will dedicate a glorious red maple tree planted behind a solid bronze plaque thanking them for their service to our country.

We invite all local veterans, their families, and members of the community to join us as we celebrate “Our Four Guys” and honor all of the many veterans of the Class of ‘66 who served our country. Your presence will reinforce our class’s recognition of the sacrifice made by “Our Four Guys” and their families. Your presence will help us to honor all of the many veterans of the Class of 1966. Please join us on Saturday, April 27, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at Roxana High School near the athletic field concession stand. In case of rain, we will gather in the gymnasium. We hope to see you there.

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