

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Service honors sacrifices

Of service men, women and their families



Carver Memorial Gardens held its 25th annual Memorial Day service Monday. Above, the Rev. Thurman O. Echols Jr., pastor of Moral Hill Missionary Baptist Church, does not let a downpout keep him from addressing the crowd. Holding the umbrella is the Rev. Eric Hairston.

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By DEBBIE HALL - Bulletin Staff Writer

A downpour did not dampen the spirits of the more than 100 people who gathered Monday for the 25th Annual Memorial Day Service at Carver Memorial Gardens.

The event honored fallen heroes, those who have served in the military and those who continue to serve. Constance Martin, program coordinator and a member of American Legion Homer Dillard Auxiliary Post 78, said the service also was designed to remember "all the families who have lost loved ones" in the fight for freedom.

The Rev. Thurman O. Echols Jr., an Army veteran and pastor of Moral Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Axton, was keynote speaker for the event.

"We are gathered to remember the men and women who paid" the ultimate price for freedom, although "we often take it for granted," Echols said. More than 4,000 service men and women have died while serving in Iraq and more than 600 in Afghanistan "so we can sleep in peace," he said. "We must keep the memories of these men and women."

Recalling his tour of duty in Vietnam, Echols said he was "blessed to come home." Many were not so lucky. "I cannot forget ... will not forget" those who paid with their lives, he said. In keeping with the "Lest We Forget" theme of the event, the service also included a POW-MIA ceremony by Joseph Ellison of Post 78 to honor prisoners of war and those missing in action. Peggy Santuk of Amvets Post 35 explained that a table set with a single place setting was symbolic of the fact that some service men and women are "missing from our midst." Although those people commonly are referred to as POWs or MIAs, "we call them brothers and sisters," Santuk said.

A white cloth covering the table symbolized "the purity of intentions" while a single red rose stood for the affected families, Santuk said. An empty chair, she added, signified that many "are not here."

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, which was led by youth from Antioch Christian Church, and the National Anthem, performed by the Magna Vista High School Band, the Rev. Eric Hairston, pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church, gave the invocation.

"This day is a special day set aside to memorialize those who paid the ultimate price for freedom's sake," Hairston said. The Rev. Larry D. Penn, pastor of New Sharon Grove Baptist

Church, chose a verse from Hebrews as Scripture for the service.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things not seen," Penn said. Curtis Millner, commander of the Homer Dillard post and a member of the Henry County School Board, introduced Herbert Hatcher, the state commander of Amvets, as well as other veteran commanders and auxiliary presidents.

The Magna Vista band also performed "Nearer My God To Thee," and Sonny Richardson, incoming commander of Homer Dillard Post 78, recognized dignitaries attending the event. Among them were state Sen. Roscoe Reynolds, D-Ridgeway, and Debra Buchanan, chairman of the Henry County Board of Supervisors.

Martin presented a plaque to Echols from the Memorial Committee for his efforts. Henry County Sheriff's Lt. Joe Louis Hairston also received a plaque to recognize his service. Former committee member George W. Foster Jr. was remembered for his service as was Don Young, a 20-year Navy veteran who died during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon, Martin said.

Young, 41 and formerly of Bassett, was a chief information system technician and received many medals and awards during his tenure, Martin said.

The service concluded with the Magna Vista High School JROTC's laying of the wreath and the Martinsville/Henry County Veterans Memorial Honor Guard performing Taps.

