



## Field of honor: New Memorial weekend event to pay tribute to veterans

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Remembering and honoring veterans is a very personal Memorial Day tradition for Lisa Bixler and her family. The mother of Army Pvt. Evan Bixler, who died in December 2006 during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Bixler places flowers at the graves of her son and his friend, Spc. Eric Poelman, around this time every year. Poelman, of Mount Pleasant, died while serving in Baghdad in June 2005.

This May, Bixler is grateful to also have the opportunity to honor Evan and his friend through a new event called the Healing Field of Southeast Wisconsin. A display of large American flags on poles, the Healing Field will be set up in Pershing Park Friday, May 27, through Monday, May 30, and is designed to honor lives lost and sacrifices made by our military, law enforcement and fire-fighting personnel.

Organized by the Racine Scouts Drum & Bugle Corps, Racine's Healing Field is modeled after hundreds of other such flag displays which have flown in communities across the United States for a variety of occasions and purposes, coordinated by the Colonial Flag Foundation ([www.healingfield.org](http://www.healingfield.org)). The original Healing Field - which was held in Utah on the first anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks - was organized as a way to visualize and comprehend the sheer enormity of human loss that occurred on 9/11.

Racine's event is meant to pay tribute to all those who have fought for our country's freedom, according to Andrea Birbilis, manager of the Racine Scouts. She and members of the drum and bugle corps have been selling the 3-by-5-foot flags, which will fly on 5-foot poles, in hopes of creating a large field of honor along Racine's lake front for Memorial Day weekend.

Bixler purchased two flags to fly in Racine's Healing Field because she wants to support an event that will bring recognition of what the American flag represents.

"I think it will bring awareness to the fact that the flag does not fly on its own - there's a lot of loss that has gone into it," she said.

Bixler said she hopes the Healing Field will help people realize that Memorial Day is a time for remembering, rather than just barbecues and an extra travel day.

"I was very touched by their willingness to bring something like this to Racine, and I hope the community will come out and experience it."

### Opening ceremonies

The Healing Field of Southeast Wisconsin will officially open at 7 p.m. Friday, May 27, with a ceremony featuring guest speakers and live entertainment. Performers will include the 484th Army Band Brass Ensemble out of Milwaukee; the Penguin Players theatrical troupe; and Racine Scouts alumni.

Speakers during the ceremony will include state Sen. Van Wanggaard, Racine County Executive James Ladwig and Mayor John Dickert. Winners of the Scholastic essay contest "What the Flag Means to Me," will also be on hand.

Friday's ceremony will also include a Grand March of area veterans. Veterans, from all service branches, are invited to meet by the soccer field on Pershing Drive at 6:30 p.m. to organize for the march to the performance area, which will begin at 7 p.m.

Veterans are also encouraged to stop down to the Healing Field Friday afternoon, where WRJN Radio will be broadcasting live from 2 to 6 p.m. The radio station is interested in interviewing veterans for its broadcast, Birbilis said.

Visitors are invited to bring their lawn chairs or blankets and come enjoy all of Friday's ceremonies. Food and beverages will be available on site. Everyone is also welcome to experience the Healing Field flag display throughout the weekend. Boy Scout Troop 203 will camp out on the grounds to tend the flag display, which will remain up through Monday morning, according to Birbilis.

Healing Field flags are still available for sale and can be ordered by calling (262) 331-3092. Each \$40 purchase includes a 3-by-5-foot American-made flag, a 5-foot pole, a standard and, if desired, an honor certificate. Proceeds from the flag sale will benefit the Racine Scouts, which is the oldest continually competitive drum and bugle corps in North America. Those who purchased flags may keep them for their own use when the field is taken down on Monday.

While the Racine Scouts have not sold nearly as many flags as they had originally hoped, they decided to go ahead with the event because they believe so deeply in the Healing Field's purpose.

"The time has come to count the many blessings of our freedom and to thank those who serve in harm's way on our behalf," Birbilis said. "Please join us as Memorial Day weekend begins and show your appreciation to our local military, police and firefighters."

### **If You Go**

**WHAT:** Healing Field of Southeast Wisconsin

**WHEN:** Friday, May 27, through Monday, May 30. Opening ceremony will be at 7 p.m. May 27.

**WHERE:** Pershing Park, along Racine's lakefront, just south of Festival Hall.

**COST:** Admission is free. Visitors are asked to bring one non-perishable food item to be donated to the Racine County Food Bank.

**INFO:** Call (262) 331-3092.