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It's a Grand Flag Event: American colors will fill Auburn park in second-year fundraiser

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By Dorothy Long

Contributing writer

Last year on Memorial Day weekend, St. Joseph's School sponsored a fundraising event that resulted in more than 1,200 flags flying in Hoopes Park.

"We weren't going to do it this year, but we had so many requests from the community and people who didn't have an opportunity to have a flag last year, that we decided to do it again," said Darlene Nila, who chairs the Field of Hopes and Dreams committee.

The Field of Hopes and Dreams Healing Field is a licensed trademark event, which features flag displays.



Lauren Long / The Post-Standard

Mary Lou Stanton, of Auburn, finds the flag she and her sister purchased in memory of their brother, Jack Adams, who had served in the Air Force during last year's Healing Field at Hoopes Park.

As a sponsor of the local event, St. Joseph's Elementary School sells the flags to be displayed in Hoopes Park May 27 through May 30. The flags are 3 feet by 5 feet, on poles that stand 8 feet high. Each flag costs \$35 and is tagged to honor or memorialize an individual, Nila said. After the weekend, the flags are taken down and the people who bought them take them home.

"This year, the city is doing a 9/11 event at East Middle School and asked us if we would participate. People can either take the flags home after Memorial Day or we will store it for them and they can fly again

at East Middle School on 9/11 weekend. Then, they can take the flag," Nila said.

Last year, the event turned out to be a successful fundraiser, Nila said. For the anniversary of 9/11, they are hoping to more than double the number of flags flying.

"We want enough to represent all the people who died on 9/11. We want to do at least 3,000," she said.

The flags can memorialize someone who has died or honor someone living. The individual can be a veteran or not, Nila said.

Cheryl Foster brought the idea of hosting a flag display to St. Joseph's. As a former student with a niece and a nephew at the school, Foster has been involved in other fundraising projects, she said.

The idea of hosting an event came after she drove past a Field of Flags in Waterloo last year, Foster said.

"I was so impressed. It was just breathtaking. It was on the front lawn of a nursing home and I was just driving by," she said.

Last year, the event lived up to her expectations, she said.

"It was great," Foster said. "We got such a positive response. Just seeing it was breathtaking. The whole scenery, Hoopes Park and the weather was beautiful. It was everything I wanted it to be. I'm looking forward to it this year."

There will be an opening ceremony 7 p.m. May 27, with special guest speakers and singers Andy and Ryan Cooney. Everyone is invited, Foster said. "Bring a lawn chair," she added.

"We are still waiting for the speakers to confirm," Foster said.

The ceremony will be followed by a short fireworks display, she said.

An alternative site for the ceremony, in case of inclement weather, will be announced, Foster said.

As part of the weekend tribute, the Mass at St. Alphonsus will be dedicated to those lost on Sept. 11, 2001, Foster said.

Buying a flag is a great way to honor someone, Foster said.

"It is open to anyone. They don't have to be military and they don't have to be deceased," she said.

To learn more

Any organization or individual interested in helping sponsor the flag display event can call Cheryl Foster, at 253-3174.

For more information or to purchase a flag, visit the website healingfield.org/auburn-ny-2011/ or call St. Joseph's School at 253-8327.

If you go...

What: Opening ceremony

When: 7 p.m. May 27

Where: Hoopes Park, East Genesee Street, Auburn

Cost: None

What else: Bring a lawn chair

Viewing: The flags will fly through May 30.

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