

Attention focuses on Vietnam parade

MIKE GALLAGHER
GAZETTE STAFF WRITER

"The Parade That Never Was" may be a misnomer after Sunday's festivities are completed honoring America's Vietnam War veterans and "their contributions to a nation that never really thanked them."

Those sentiments of Tom Emig of 615 Davis and his wife, Janice, sparked a movement that will culminate Sunday with throngs of marchers, music and merriment attended by Iowans, Ohioans and New Yorkers and maybe 4,000 to 5,000 Kalamazooans.

All veterans are asked to join in the parade and those slated to march have each been

asked to bring a buddy, Emig said.

The parade will showcase the talents of several bands.

The parade is to kick off at 2 p.m. from the Upjohn Co. parking lot at the corner of Portage and Lovell streets, then proceed west on Lovell to Park Street, turn north to Michigan Avenue, then east to Portage Street.

Emig said the turnout for the event "should be terrific."

"We've been getting calls from Iowa, Illinois, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York City, and been interviewed in several cities," Emig said.

"The response has just been amazing."

The Vietnam veterans even won their latest battle, this time against bureaucratic red tape. Their weapon? A congressman.

"We ran into a lot of red tape trying to get the 74th Marching Band of Indianapolis here," Emig said.

"They're considered one of the best. We had to get approval from the Army, and the red tape was amazing.

"But Congressman Howard Wolpe made a phone call and said, 'I want them here,' and we

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got them. That surprised even members of the band who didn't believe we could get them on such short notice."

The "overwhelming response" is the result of many things, Emig said, "but most of all, I think it was just something that everyone had inside them for the last 10 years ... not honoring our Vietnam vets."

Assisting the Emigs in parade preparation is Jerry DeRyke, president of the Kalamazoo chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA).

Parade watchers can look to the sky for the signal to start the march as a jet flyover and a squadron of Army Huey helicopters from Holland are expected to fill the air-

ways in honor of their comrades.

Units that have promised to be in the parade include the VVA chapters from as far away as Detroit, Army Reserve medics and members of the 101st Airborne Division.

After the parade, veterans and spectators have been invited to visit Bronson Park where local bands will perform, along with speakers and a magic show by the "Amazing Master of Magic" P.J. Weber of Grand Rapids.

Cooperation by city officials has been outstanding, Emig said, singling out Jake Jeppesen, assistant director of Kalamazoo's special services department.

"Everyone has been helpful, and it should be a very special, touching tribute," Emig said. "If the weather holds up for us, it'll be terrific."