

# 'We Are Still Here Contributing'

## A VFW Post in Connecticut created a designated area at one of the oldest running races in the country to celebrate veterans who participate

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Heralded as one of the oldest races in the country, the Manchester Road Race in Connecticut has, for the past five years, honored all veterans who participate by designating a Veterans' Row section near the town's Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Spearheaded by VFW Post 2046 in Manchester in 2019, the Veterans' Row area is lined with American flags, a POW/MIA flag, as well as the flags of each military service, paying tribute to all passing veterans as they compete in the race.

"I believe that Veterans' Row has a major impact on all the veterans who attend, especially those running in the race," said Paul Scappaticci, a past VFW Post 2046 commander and current member of the Veterans' Row committee. "I know it gives them a great sense of pride to have us brothers and sisters in arms present on Thanksgiving morning showing our support for them."

Since its inception, the Veterans' Row also provides all veterans in attendance with a pre-race reception, where Post 2046 members and other local veterans' organizations provide light refreshments and food under tents as a way to build camaraderie.

Serving as a world-class qualifier for the Boston Marathon and other races, the 4.75-mile Manchester Road Race, which was first run in 1927, also averages about 11,000 participants and spectators each November. That makes it a prime opportunity for recruitment, VFW Post 2046 Quartermaster Eugene Bacon said.

"They come over before the race starts and meet and greet with us, and we offer them coffee and snacks and sometimes sign up a new member or two," Bacon said. "Usually there are many first responders and police officers, and since many who participate come from all over, we also sometimes have to write referrals for VFW Posts in their home states."

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This opportunity for recruitment and to showcase a local presence in the community is why Bacon and other officers at Post 2046 believe it is crucial to continue to invest in the Manchester Road Race's Veterans' Row.

Since creating the section, the Post has routinely donated \$1,000 each year to cover tents, drinks and food along Manchester's Main Street, as well as ad placements on the racing program pamphlets passed out all throughout the day, according to Bacon.

"We lost our Post seven years ago, and so this lets the community know that we are still here," said Bacon, who added the Post has since found a temporary location at the local Army and Navy Club. "We want to remain a presence in the community, let them know that we are doing more than just existing. We are still here contributing in any way we can."

Post 2046 members also remain active in other ways. Last month, they welcomed, along with the town of Manchester, The Wall That Heals, a traveling replica of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

To bring the memorial to Manchester, Post 2046 members donated \$2,500, along with several other donations from local veterans organizations and fraternities.

"We wanted to bring this to our town because Vietnam veterans are going away quickly, and we need to keep reminding the public that that effort from 1963-75 was a real war," Bacon said. "Our brothers and sisters are going away at a rapid pace."

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