



## Waiting for the Eagle to Land

by Carol (Klenk) Heck

This hand-sculpted bronze eagle was displayed at the Veterans Memorial Plaza at McDonald Commons Park beginning in May of 2007 until around 2023; about 16 years in total. The park has since been redesigned and then re-opened in May of 2024. The 2007 Veterans Memorial was dismantled and also redesigned. Madeira's newest, 2024 Veterans Memorial (the 6<sup>th</sup> one) now includes the Space Force military branch as well as Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard branches represented by flags and plaques. The old bricks, engraved with the veterans' names from 2007, are being given back to the families and this bronze sculpted eagle, handmade by local artist and former 1978-1981 mayor, Forest Atkins, is now somewhere in storage. The promise is to reinstall it at the new Memorial site in McDonald Commons.

Madeira had 3 other Veterans Memorials starting around 1942 through 1982, These were: #1 located on the corner of Camargo and Miami, #2, a larger version replaced the first, but eventually was relocated to the front lot at the original Madeira High School building (later Sellman Middle School, now Madeira Middle School), and #3, was a stone pyramidal monument with one plaque on it. It was maintained by The Madeira Garden Club, and was erected on the right-hand side of the driveway to Sellman school. \*

The first version of McDonald Commons Park opened in 1978. The Madeira American Legion Post #412 dedicated the 4<sup>th</sup> Veterans Memorial there with a plaque on Memorial Day, 1983. The memorial was in front of the shelter house and had an American flag, a drinking fountain, a few wooden angular benches and curved concrete wall structures. (I believe the 3<sup>rd</sup> monument remained on Sellman School grounds until later.)

In 2002, the annual Silent Memorial Day March had begun at Sellman Park and ended at McDonald Commons. Marchers, residents, and veterans of Madeira began talking about how uninspired they were with their veteran's memorial. They wanted a more impressive and representative area to honor the men and women who served our country. Madeira Recreation and Parks Board, the Madeira Historical Society, and the Madeira Women's Club worked in conjunction to make this 5<sup>th</sup> Veterans Memorial come to fruition. It was a five-year endeavor. Committees were formed, research was done, and citizens were informed. Architectural drawings were created, a model was made by Jay DeWitt and Forest Atkins, and permits were obtained. The existing 4<sup>th</sup> (1983) McDonald Commons Park memorial and drinking fountain were removed. The land was excavated and private fundraising for \$102,000 began. The community was involved, and passionate about the project.

Ground was broken in May of 2005, and work began that fall season. But funds were still needed in order to go ahead with the project. Money came in from local companies. Businesses,

involved with the project, donated labor or reduced their costs on materials. Private citizens donated funds. Paving bricks, with engraved names, were purchased for \$50.00 each. The entire memorial was a huge community effort involving thousands of volunteer hours from residents. Students volunteering earned community service hours.

You may remember, the memorial had a paved circular area, five flags representing the military branches, an American flag with a P. O.W. flag, limestone benches, and landscaping. The former water fountain was reinstalled. This bronze eagle with a 6 ft. wingspan was placed at the entrance on a tall stanchion. The Madeira Women's Club donated that 3<sup>rd</sup> stone pyramid memorial and plaque at Sellman to be incorporated within this memorial.

Kathy Bechtold, from Madeira Parks and Recreation, was the organizer of the Veterans Memorial Committee; Les Lefevre was the chairman; Forest Atkins, coordinator; Jim Benjamin, co-coordinator; Melinda Reckers, committee secretary. Dave Ballweg did the architectural drawings, with assistance from Forest Atkins. Mary Lou DeMar, hometown artist, painted a watercolor concept of the project which was used for major publicity. Bill Case, Bob Tuke, and countless others were on site and behind the scenes making this all possible. Committee meetings were held on an average of once or twice a month. Public meetings were also held to inform and raise awareness.

In March of 2004, Forest Atkins suggested that he could sculpt the large eagle in a protective pose to adorn the entrance of the area, saving artist's fees of \$30,000. He normally worked in other mediums but he felt he could do it. It turned out very well! I give Forest Atkins credit for creating the eagle; however, he didn't do it alone. Another accomplished naturalist artist specializing in Native American art, Les LeFevre, worked with Forest on the arrangement of the feathers. George Suckeriah, a structural engineer colleague from University of Cincinnati analyzed the natural forces that should be applied to the eagle. The full-size clay model that Forest created, went from his garage to a foundry in Deer Park; Hawkins Studio. Artists Jarrett and Celene Hawkins took it from there, making casts, molds, and applying a wax to complete the "lost wax" process. They poured the molten bronze into the mold at the studio. The wings were cast separately and then expertly welded into place by Celene. Lastly, she applied the acid protective layer. Ethan Parker took photographs of the entire process. The statue was finished and placed on site in early 2007.

I went on the Silent March this year. The park looks really nice and I hope it has gone through its last rebuild. I miss the bricks engraved with veterans' names and branch of service. Reading the names makes it seem more meaningful.

I am not the only person waiting for the eagle to reappear. It is such a work of symbolism and artistic skill that we must keep it alive by putting it back up on display.

\*See my other story on "Veterans Day, A National Holiday Since 1926" at MadeiraHS.org website under Carol's Madeira History Stories.

Thank you to Forest for donating all the committee minutes from the project, photos, the PowerPoint of his library presentation, newspaper articles, and work contracts.

Photo courtesy of Ethan Parker.

Originally written June 2025.

Also see “Veterans Day, A National Holiday Since 1926” and “The Spauldings & McDonald Commons”, under Madeira Families.