

# Veterans Day event starts at 4,800 feet

By: [Erin Hinrichs](#)



Isaiah Maring and Larry Yatch of the Patriot Parachute Team land a 10-foot Old Glory across from the North St. Paul Veterans Park Nov. 11. They formerly served as active duty Navy SEALs. (Linda Baumeister/Review)

## Spectators gather at memorial to pay tribute

By 11 a.m., a large crowd gathered at the North St. Paul Veterans Park is fixated on a plane flying over the North High soccer field. Out jump two veteran Navy SEALs parachutists, holding an outstretched American flag.

It doesn't take long for them to land safely on the ground. But the display leaves a lasting impression on many of those who showed up to pay their respects to veterans — including students from Christ Lutheran.

Fifth-grader Zach O'Connell, 11, says it's important to observe Veterans Day because people who serve, like his grandfather and uncle, "give us freedom."

"On a scale of one to 10, it was a 10," he says of the patriotic spectacle.

Angela Strong, one of the lead organizers of the event, brought her 11-year-old daughter, Kyra, along as well.

"She has been taught to respect and honor the flag," Angela says, noting both of Kyra's grandfathers are veterans.

It's the type of sentiment that runs deep in North St. Paul, where the community recently held a dedication ceremony for its new Veterans Park, located at the intersection of Margaret Street and Highway 36.

"It's definitely going to put its mark on the map," Strong says of the park. "It's gorgeous."

### Why parachutists?

Strong, owner of Journey of Misfits Dog Training — one of the latest additions to the North St. Paul business community — met members of the Patriot Parachute Team while visiting the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. She had a trained therapy dog in tow, offering veterans on site the opportunity to connect and share their stories.

When she came home, she ran the idea of bringing the parachutists to North St. Paul for Veterans Day past those at WebWolf Design and the logistics were squared away roughly three weeks later.

It cost \$3,500 to bring two parachutists to town, an expense that a number of local businesses helped cover.

Council member Candy Petersen signed on as a major sponsor of the event once she saw how enthusiastic Strong was about bringing something new to the community to honor veterans.

“I believed in it,” Petersen says, noting her father was a veteran and the Veterans Park is a source of great pride in the community.

“I don’t know how we’re going to do this bigger next year,” she said before raising her cell phone to snap a few photos of the descending parachutists.

After the safe landing, the North St. Paul VFW Post 1350 honor guards conducted a volley fire at the park — a ritual they intend to perform every Veterans Day. Members of the North St. Paul American Legion Post 39 stood nearby.

The solemn moment brought tears to the eyes of at least one Veteran in the crowd as he saluted the honor guard while wearing his baseball cap emblazoned with his veteran’s service: Vietnam War.

Afterward, local veterans mingled with city staff, event organizers and community members at the park, enjoying free refreshments and recounting tales from their service.

The opportunity to be a part of this event — even after doing 25 shows in Minnesota this year, and plenty more across the nation— meant a lot to Isaiah Maring and Larry Yatch, the two parachutists who made the jump.

“For me, it’s therapeutic,” Yatch says, adding it’s nice to be able to apply his Navy SEALs training post-service to a new mission that’s geared toward both inspiring future soldiers and honoring veterans.



Maring and Yatch layed a wreath at the memorial with the American Legion Post 39 Honor Guard standing nearby. (Linda Baumeister/Review)

### **Paying respect**

Longtime North St. Paul resident Kevin Holgren, 59, made a point to attend the service to support those who have served, including his father and father-in-law.

“I think it’s pretty important that we take time to give our veterans respect because we’re able to do what we do because they did what they did,” he says.

That includes local veterans like Matthew Hearden, 27, who served in the Marines from 2006 to 2010 and was deployed twice.

As the youngest member of the VFW Post 1350 honor guards, he participated in the volley fire at the park.

“It’s not all about barbeques,” he says of the holiday. “It shouldn’t be just one day a year. That’s why I do a lot of stuff with the VFW.”

Nearby, another local veteran, 92-year-old Ellsworth Erickson, was busy making his rounds at the park. Not only was the day significant for him because he served in World War II but also because he's credited with envisioning a memorial park in North St. Paul as far back as the early '90s.

Asked what Veterans Day means to him, Erickson says, "It's recognition. It's just recognition and maybe some caring thoughts."

After years of tirelessly championing his vision to give local veterans and their family members a dedicated place to reflect year-round, he was proud to see everything come together Nov. 11.

"Every Veterans Day now, they're going to have something special. I don't know how they're gonna top this," he says with a smile.



The North St. Paul VFW Post 1350 Honor Guard proceeds with the Rifle Volley during the Veterans Day recognition. (Linda Baumeister/Review)



World War II veteran Ellsworth Erickson was pleased with the North St. Paul Veterans Park and the day's special tribute. (Linda Baumeister/Review)



Christ Lutheran students, grades 5 through 8, ventured out to pay their respects to veterans at the event. (Linda Baumeister/Review)



The North St. Paul American Legion Honor Guard salutes. (Linda Baumeister/Review)



Spectators gathered to see the parachutists applaud the team at the North St. Paul Veterans Park on Nov. 11. (Linda Baumeister/Review)