

## **Hometown Heroes Banner Program**

By Ariane Komyati

Last week, West Roxbury Main Streets (WRMS) announced that West Roxbury is launching a Hometown Heroes Banner Program, a community initiative designed to pay tribute to past and present members of the Armed Forces.

Each banner will prominently display the person's photo, name, branch of service, and credentials. Sponsored by friends and family, the banners will be showcased along Centre Street, Spring Street, and side streets throughout WR.

Lindsey Chase, who took on the role of Executive Director at WRMS in January, made the Hometown Heroes Banner Program one of her first initiatives. Having grown up in WR, Chase has met many veterans in the community. Honoring them and telling their stories is very important to Chase. "I want people to drive around West Roxbury and see their stories, that's important to us [WRMS]," she said.

After posting information about the Hometown Heroes Banner Program last week, Chase received dozens of emails highlighting WR community members who have protected our country. One email told the story of a Veteran who stormed the beaches of Normandy. WRMS has also been emailed about multiple pioneering women in the U.S. Armed Forces. "A lot of these people, they do their service, and they're quiet about it," explained Chase. "It is not them who want to honor themselves, it's their families who want to honor them. And it seems like a lot of the time, families don't really know how to."

Chase hopes these banners will help bring the community together and beautify the streets. "I want people to drive around West Roxbury and see their stories, that's important to us [WRMS]," she said. Community members will also be able to see the Veterans and read their stories while taking a stroll down Centre St.

To be eligible for a banner, individuals must be actively serving in the U.S. military, be a veteran with an honorable discharge, or have died in the line of duty. All honorees must be current or former residents of West Roxbury, having lived in the community for at least ten years (exceptions will be made on a case by case basis.) "Proof of eligibility will be required before an application is considered complete," WRMS stated on their Facebook and Instagram pages. WRMS also handed out fliers regarding the program earlier this week.

Each banner costs \$240. “ I hope that in subsequent years, we'll [WRMS] be able to cover the cost. There have been people who have reached out to me to say, ‘I'm not a veteran, but whatever I can do to help with this project, I'll chip in,’” said Chase. The banners are made with durable, commercial grade vinyl.

There are many admirable and historical veterans with ties to WR, including Captain Tom Kelley, Army Officer Aaron Daggett, and Lance Cpl. Paul Reid.

Captain Kelley, a West Roxbury native, served in various roles in the U.S. Navy. In 1969, during the Vietnam War, he led a mission to extract American troops when one of the eight river assault boats under his command was disabled. He suffered injuries but successfully coordinated the rescue operation and moved the boats to safety. Captain Kelley was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Nixon in 1970. After a 30-year Navy career, he worked for the Department of Defense and later served as Secretary of the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services. His portrait is featured on a mural on Centre St.

US Army officer Aaron Daggett was the last surviving brevet Union general of the American Civil War. In 1866, he was nominated by President Andrew Johnson to be brevet brigadier general. A brevet is a temporary promotion in rank. Daggett passed away in his home in WR in 1938, a month shy of his 101st birthday.

Marine Lance Cpl. Paul Reid was the first WR resident to be killed during the Vietnam War, just a few days before his 19th birthday. He is remembered with a memorial sign at Baker St. and VFW Pkwy. Reid is buried at the Gardens at Gethsemane and is honored every year during their annual Memorial Day service.

The historic Westerly Burial Ground in WR is the final resting place for eight veterans of the American Revolutionary War and fifteen veterans of the Civil War.

The Hometown Heroes Banner program was first introduced in Harrisburg, PA, in 2006. Today, these banners are displayed in communities across the United States, including several towns and cities in Massachusetts, such as Lowell, Dudley, Westborough, Fitchburg, Maynard, Leominster, and Erving. To learn more, visit [hometownheroesbanners.com](http://hometownheroesbanners.com).