

# Wichita City, Kansas

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**Music, dance mark Vietnamese American Community Memorial groundbreaking**

**BY DEB GRUVER**

**The Wichita Eagle**

The Vietnam War divided many people. Supporters of the Vietnamese American Community Memorial — a controversial project because some didn't want it in Veterans Memorial Park — hope their monument will bring people together.



*Mayor Carl Brewer - Photo by the VA Community*

At the groundbreaking ceremony for the memorial, on city-owned land separated by a berm from the park — Mayor Carl Brewer said it will "remind us of a time when our country was divided" over the Vietnam War.

"Some of those wounds have healed, and some remain with us today," he said. "The scars of war are never easily covered. But this memorial represents an opportunity to look ahead.... It will remind us that our freedoms cannot be taken for granted."

The memorial, expected to be completed in early 2011, will honor the sacrifices of Americans and South Vietnamese who fought the communist North Vietnamese.

Sung Thanh Doan, president of the Vietnamese American Community of Wichita, told veterans in the crowd that "you (were) side-by-side with us in the war."

He also thanked Wichita for welcoming Vietnamese-American residents "arm in arm" in the community.

The groundbreaking ceremony was mostly in Vietnamese and featured traditional dragon dances and music. Veterans wore their uniforms, and some women wore traditional long Vietnamese dresses.

When Veterans Memorial Park was dedicated in the 1970s, there were no stipulations about who could be memorialized there.

In 2006, the city's park board approved the Vietnamese Community of Wichita's proposed memorial, but it quickly drew opponents who thought the park should only honor U.S. soldiers.

In April, the Wichita City Council approved the location of the Vietnamese memorial by a 7-0 vote negotiated by City Manager Robert Layton.

It will be separated from the park by an earthen berm at least 6 feet tall, and no sidewalk will link the two areas.

Van Nguyen, president of the Vietnamese Student Association, attended the groundbreaking with several other students who will help care for the memorial.

Nguyen said the memorial is exciting for those of her generation.

"We don't get to experience a lot of this," she said of events highlighting the Vietnamese culture.

"We tend to forget about our own culture," she said.

Photos



Groundbreaking – Vietnamese-American leaders and Mayor Carl Brewer  
*(Photo by the Vietnamese-American Community)*

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Jaime Oppenheimer/The Wichita Eagle  
People attending the ground breaking ceremony for the Vietnamese American Community Memorial are photographed in front of a Huey UH1H similar to one that was used in during the Vietnam war. The helicopter was on loan from the Kansas Museum of Military History.



Jaime Oppenheimer/The Wichita Eagle  
The honor guard carried American and Vietnam flags during the ground breaking ceremony for the Vietnamese American Community Memorial across the river from Exploration Place. National anthems from both countries were performed.