

The 'Honor Rose' To Grow in Brooklyn

Remembering Efforts
Of American Vets

By Sara B. Miller
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN — In a simple yet powerful ceremony, about 10 war veterans affiliated with Brooklyn's Vet Center, from World War II to the Vietnam War, helped the New York City Parks Department plant the Veteran's Honor Rose between two trees in the Korean War Plaza at Cadman Plaza Park on Wednesday morning.

The hybrid tea rosebush will bud with dark red petals and dark green, semi-glossy foliage, to symbolize the honor and respect all Americans owe war veterans for their service and sacrifice. It will grow to a height of about 4 feet and width of about 5 feet.

The rose was distributed by the company Jackson & Perkins, based in Oregon, to veteran services agencies and medical centers throughout the country. One was planted at the Department of Veterans Affairs at the New York Harbor Health Care System, Brooklyn Campus earlier this summer.

"It is symbolic, a permanent reminder of all vets of all previous wars," says veteran John Westbay, who served in the Marines during World War II. He believes such dedications to be therapeutic, as they are the public's way of thanking veterans for serving their country. "It's a nice idea."

The Veteran's Honor Rose was created specially, at the personal recommendation of the Honorable Kenneth W. Kizer, MD, to signify the pride and gratitude that the country has for its veterans. "Without their sacrifices and beneficence, the freedoms that Americans and many other people around the world enjoy today would not be possible," Kizer noted.

Jackson & Perkins donated the bushes around Memorial Day weekend, and debuted the new rose in the nation's capitol during a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on May 27. The mail-order rose company also pledged 10 percent of the proceeds of the rose's sale to VA medical research, which supports more than 7,000 investigators working on more than 15,000 projects primarily in clinical settings throughout the VA health-care system.

Kevin O'Brien, MSW, team leader for the Vet Center, says that as the population of veterans begins to dwindle (especially from the world wars), such ceremonies remind veterans of their importance to the country. "For all vets, it is nice to be remembered."

The Center's mission is to provide a wide range of counseling, outreach and referral services to veterans and their families, free of cost.

The services help veterans, who experience psychological and social distress, readjust to civilian life by providing free counseling per a Congress provision in 1979.

In 1991, the legislation extended eligibility for counseling to veterans of post-Vietnam era conflicts, including the Persian Gulf, Panama, Grenada and Lebanon theaters of operation.

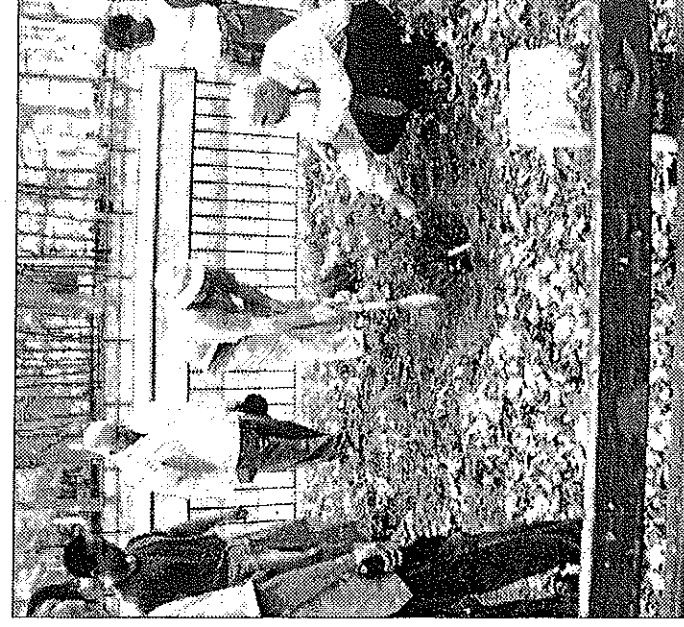
"It has helped a lot of guys deal with reality," says Westbay.



Pictured in front of the Korean War Veterans' Plaza on Court and Tillary Streets are war veterans (from left to right) Ron Sasser, Fred Schwally, director Kevin O'Brien, John Westbay, and Charles Traub.



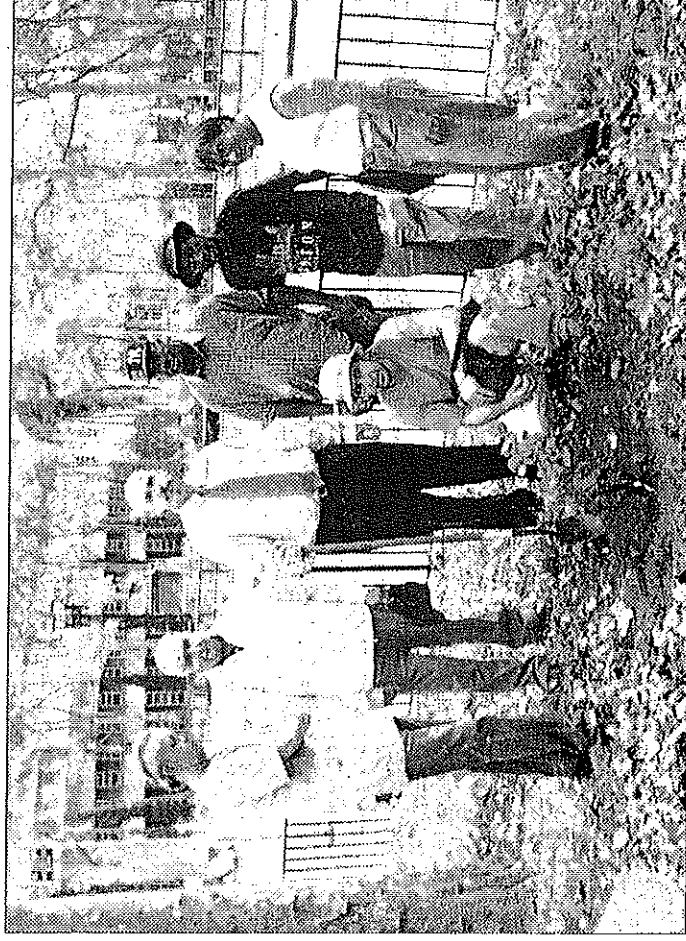
Kevin O'Brien, MSW, team leader for the Vet Center, helps direct the digging process for the honorary rose bush in the Korean War Veterans' Plaza as some veterans look on.



War veteran Fred Schwally helps in the digging process for the honorary rose bush that was planted in the Korean War Veteran's Plaza in Brooklyn Heights.



The war veterans take a moment of silence to honor the newly planted rosebush and those killed and injured in past American wars.



War veterans pictured from left to right are Charles Traub, Jon Westbay, Vet Center leader Kevin O'Brien, Charles Johnson, Ron Sasser, Fred Schwally, and Mihanel Pabon (kneeling).

Photos by
Josh Simons