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Thanks to those who made Memorial Day meaningful

The small patch of green at the heart of Garfield Ridge came alive with the sounds of a trumpet player, a rifle salute and the singing of patriotic songs, all to honor those who have served in the military and given, as Rhine VFW Post Commander Charlie Johnson said, "the ultimate sacrifice" to keep the U.S.A. and its citizens free.

The short program hosted on Memorial Day by the Garfield Ridge Chamber of Commerce was led by President Mary Ellen Brown. About 50 to 60 people gathered to remember family members and friends they lost to foreign wars. She gave a nod to Dr. John Baietti, GRCC first vice president, who comes up with the artful themes sometimes featured in the triangle at 55th, Archer and Narragansett. Mary Ellen is very familiar in the neighborhood, helping busi-

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Members of the Rhine VFW Post 2729 stand watch over the Memorial Day observance at the triangle at 55th, Archer and Narragansett. – *Supplied photo*

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nesses stay in the area and become successful.

Mary Shilney was there, supporting the veterans and those who put on the program. She is a very familiar face to all the movers and shakers in Garfield Ridge and Clearing with her enthusiasm and support for the community. She serves on local organizations, giving members a taste of her intelligence, wit and humor. She is a welcoming figure to all in her sphere.

Jim Homan was there, directing traffic and getting drivers to slow down for the safety of those at the ceremony.

Ald. Silvana Tabares took time out of her schedule and away from her family to come to the ceremony. She is a very visible and viable presence in the 23rd Ward, taking care of her constituents. She is a cheerleader for all.

The Garfield Ridge Neighborhood Watch was represented. They have labored to help spruce up the triangle and keep it secure.

The triangle itself was green and clean—better looking by far than I have seen in the 28 years I have lived in Garfield Ridge.

But one man who gave his time, talent and money to make the triangle look that way, stayed quietly in the background. He took cellphone video of the ceremony, but never took the microphone.

No one saw when—hours earlier—he came out to make sure the lawn was cut and the triangle clean before the program.

No one saw when he donated thousands of dollars' worth of labor to install the commemorative bricks that adorn the triangle. The same bricks that feature the names of loved ones, some who lived in the area, some whose families now live in the area who served and some who died in wars.

Several benches adorn the triangle thanks in part to him. They are a place to sit and reflect about what Memorial Day and everyday means; how every day someone is missing from family life and an empty chair is all that remains of that person.

I'm speaking of Geno Randazzo, owner of All Exterior Contractors, who constantly impresses those who call Garfield Ridge and Clearing home. He is not afraid to work hard to support this community, to make things better for all who live here. He does so much work behind the scenes no one knows about. He extends courtesies to those he doesn't know, but need help right now. As a longtime member of the community, I want to extend my personal thanks to Geno.

And thanks to all of you for giving me time to reflect on my Uncle Jack.

Jack Heelan served three tours of duty in Vietnam as a frontline medic. I can't imagine the horrors he saw. The family has a photo of him and my dad, he was my dad's youngest brother--bright and laughing in his Army uniform. I was young then, so I don't remember if he was between tours or just visiting before he went off to war.

After the war, I don't know if he smiled much anymore. He remained a shadowy figure, not really settling anywhere for a long time. He suffered from mental illness and deteriorated both physically and mentally until he gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country. Technically, he did not die in a foreign war. So I don't believe you'll find his name etched on any Washington, D.C. memorial. But his name is etched in my heart.

A brick in the triangle says, *Freedom isn't free*. It never was, and I know this for a fact.

Thanks too for letting me reflect on what Memorial Day means, letting me wave the flag, say the *Pledge of Allegiance* and sing songs that reflect patriotism and the goodness of this country. The ceremony at the triangle gave all of us a chance to say "God bless the USA" and mean it.

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