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Historic veterans monument ready for unveiling

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DERRY — Last weekend, those driving by MacGregor Park got a sneak peek at the town's newest monument.

For a short time, the shiny 18,000-pound stone was in public view as workers prepared the site around the new structure over the weekend — the first in the nation to honor living veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Derry Veterans Monument Committee.

Pinkerton Academy JROTC cadets provided labor to install brick pavers around the monument site in the park. Cadets were supervised by landscaper Bill Gardocki of Interstate Landscape Inc., and Hudson Quarry provided the pavers. Other donations came in from American Excavating and Aggregate Industries, providing work and materials to prepare the site before the big reveal.

The monument will be unveiled to the public in a Memorial Day celebration on May 26. Gov. John Lynch is expected to make the keynote address during the ceremony, set for 4 p.m. in MacGregor Park. A townwide parade precedes the park events at 3 p.m. An all-American cookout will follow the unveiling in the park.

The committee has approved additional names to be engraved on the black granite stone. Names of 57 Derry men and women who have served, or are serving, in the military are already engraved on the monument. The new names were submitted to the committee after the initial cutoff date. Names will be added regularly as long as the war goes on.

The stone's cover will be lifted temporarily to allow Manchester Memorial Company workers to engrave the additional names.

Names were collected by the Derry Recreation Department, on behalf of the Derry Veterans Monument Committee. Applications were reviewed and individually signed off by the monument committee review board. Approval was based on residency, dates of service, and conduct of service. The Pinkerton Academy Alumni Office helped confirm residency of applicants.

"We have taken great care to include only the names of eligible service members and veterans," said monument committee member and VFW Post 1617 commander Richard Tripp. "Our goal was to establish strict protocols for inclusion on the monument and then abide by them."

The town's newest veterans monument stands near four other monuments in the park, honoring veterans of World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, and conflicts in the Persian Gulf, Lebanon, Grenada and Panama.