

The Vietnam War was a devastating war for many; the events that took place will forever impact our society as we know it. However, with the 43 years that have passed since the war, many generations are growing up with little to no knowledge of its imprint.

On Veterans Day in 1996, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund introduced a replica of the memorial in Washington, D.C. This was "The Wall That Heals," and since then, it has appeared in 700 communities around the nation. When visiting the memorial, you will be surrounded by volunteers who are equipped with informational pamphlets about different aspects of The Wall.

Doug Green, who grew up in New Jersey, graduated from Ohio University in 1974 and decided to volunteer to help with The Wall when it was introduced to the Athens community.

"I am a Vietnam Veteran, and I feel very strongly about the wall and want to participate however I can. There is a plaque on the courthouse here in Athens of the Hometown Heroes that served in the war," Green said.

Within the display provided by "The Wall That Heals," there is a section titled "Hometown Heroes," which includes photos of the service members on The Wall, who list their hometowns as the local areas that The Wall visits. This section ties into "The Wall Of Faces," which is dedicated to honoring and remembering every person whose name is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., an effort to preserve the legacy of those who sacrificed all in Vietnam.

"It's a mixed bag of people that visit The Wall," Green said. "My daughter and her kids were here, and all they could do was grasp the moment of the 58,281 names on The Wall. With that many names, it is just enormous and hits you in the gut. I think it generates an appreciation for all the sacrifices that were made for Veterans and for the families of people who were killed in action. It definitely has a lot of emotional strings attached." Dean Murphy is a volunteer who served in the military after Vietnam and has been traveling with The Wall for the last four years and has visited about 20 communities with it. "The Wall That Heals" travels to upwards of 40 counties every year, giving people who might not be able to go to Washington, D.C., a chance to see it.

"Everybody's experience at The Wall is unique because everybody's relationship is unique. Everybody's reaction is different, but we find that The Wall is part of a mourning process," Murphy said. "The first step in mourning is to address the loss. You have to accept that person is never coming back. When you see that name engraved in The Wall, it has that finality of a gravestone."

Remembering the fallen heroes is vital in The Wall and recognizing how many lives were impacted on and off the battlefield. The "Athens County Convention and Visitors Bureau" is an office of three people who helped look at opportunities to bring The Wall into the Athens community. Typically, getting a spot for the Traveling Wall is a two-year waiting process, but

luckily, there was an opening for Athens County. Amy Spoutz, who serves as the bureau's marketing manager, worked with the city to introduce The Wall to Athens.

"We have volunteers of all ages, and they are out there working every single day. One of them is 80 years old and is a retired Veteran of The Navy. He helped us put the panels in and has had three heart attacks but continues to show up every single day," Spoutz said.

When visiting The Wall as a visitor, the impact itself is monumental. However, the volunteers' impact on the visitors of The Wall is incredibly valuable to the experience as a whole. Each volunteer has their own story of why they chose to volunteer and why they are so passionate about The Wall.

"There is a gentleman who lost his brother in the Vietnam War, and he and his wife have been very fluent in teaching the younger volunteers. They have lived the world and know it, but now are educating those of us who want to learn more. It's something that's still not taught in some history classes," Spoutz said.

For the volunteers, part of their healing has been being a part of The Wall and being able to share their own individual stories. The volunteers are extremely helpful in describing the significance of The Wall and the many stories behind it. During Vietnam, two Ohio colleges had student protests involving The Vietnam War: Kent State and Ohio University.

"I talked to a lady who was one of those protestors, but at the same time, her brother enlisted in The War, and his name is on The Wall. He was killed in action. She said part of me was a protester, but the other part of me was a sister," Spoutz said.

Ohio University and Athens County had many families who were directly involved with The Wall. Even the Ohio University Wrestling Team decided to volunteer in their own way by helping with The Wall through the setup of the panels. Boone Troyer, Executive Director for The Athens County Convention and Visitors Bureau, emphasized the impact The Wall can have on Ohio University students.

"Whether you really understand what was going on during that time or not, to actually see The Wall physically in front of you, especially at night, the lights bring tears to your eyes. When you think about what went on during that time, it has a huge impact," Troyer said.

Even though Ohio University isn't currently in session, The Wall is a valuable asset for all ages to experience. Many students have visited The Wall and talked to the volunteers involved.

"There has been a flow back and forth between students and non-students. However, it is a part of everyone's healing process. For students to hear these stories and see what this really meant to an entire generation is vitally important, but you don't get the opportunity for something like this very often. We had one guy who could never go to Washington, D.C., but he had a friend who got drafted while attending Ohio University. They had Thanksgiving dinner

together with their families. His friend was sent to Vietnam the next week and passed away two weeks later,” Troyer said.

Oftentimes, there are mixed feelings about The Vietnam War and the soldiers that were involved. For many of the soldiers who continue to serve and have served in the past, their experiences will forever change the outlook of their lives. They made connections, formed friendships, and gained unique experiences. “The Vietnam Memorial” and “The Wall That Heals” are reminders that even if you think you know the story of Vietnam, learning it from a firsthand perspective can forever change your mindset. You might be surprised and gain even more insight and understanding than you could ever imagine.

“In the military, we consider The Veterans and the other people in the military as our family. We, at times, are closer to them than anybody we have ever known. These are my brothers and sisters that I never knew. It’s an honor to be able to stand in front of this Wall and help people find the names of their loved ones,” Murphy said.