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Students remember Civil War deaths with memorial wall

By Amy Ryan • Everest Herald • June 4, 2010

WESTON – For three months of the summer last year, students in the D.C. Everest Junior High Oral History Project went through lists of 12,000 Wisconsin soldiers who died in the Civil War, preparing the names to be put on a memorial wall.

"We (each) must have put in 50 to 60 hours of typing," said freshman Ryan Eisenman, one of the students who worked on the project. "I was starting to see the names in my sleep."

The project, a Wisconsin Civil War Moving Memorial Wall, will be unveiled during the school's Civil War Day June 2 at Kennedy Park in Weston.

"Our teacher (Nancy Gajewski) had the idea (for the wall) when the Vietnam Memorial Wall was here," said freshman Krystal Obermeier, 15. "We just took it from there."

The students got the information on the Civil War soldiers from state and local resources.

"I contacted the curator of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and he sent me an electronic copy of a book of Wisconsin Civil War soldiers that printed 300 pages of 12,000 names," Eisenman said.

The students learned more than history for the project. They raised money to build the wall by writing grants to local organizations including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion and the D.C. Everest Area Education Foundation.

"We took an example of a grant written for a different project and based ours off of that," Eisenman said.

Even with a template to work from, asking for \$3,000 was difficult for the students. They had to go to various organizations in person and request the money.

"It was really nerve-wracking, but we pulled it out," Obermeier said.

Students also learned how to be responsible for a

large project.

"If something went wrong, we had to deal with it on our own," Eisenman said.

The wall stands 7 feet tall and nearly 52 feet long. The 12,000 names are transcribed onto black canvas fabric, giving the illusion of marble. The structure was built by parent volunteer Kris Peterson, who felt a special connection to the project.

"My great, great grandfather was in the Civil War. He marched with Sherman to the sea," she said. "Growing up, we had a lot of Civil War memorabilia around, since my father collected and his father collected. We would take family vacations to Civil War battle sites."

She said she loved working with the kids and seeing them make their own connections to the project.

"This really brings it home to them and how it was during the Civil War," Peterson said. "You see them work on this and they're thinking about the history and the people and they begin to realize just how unsettled Wisconsin was during the war."



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Freshmen Ryan Eisenman, left, and Carly Phillips review names for the Wisconsin Civil War Moving Memorial Wall. The wall includes names of 12,000 Wisconsin Civil War soldiers who died in battle and was compiled by students in the D.C. Everest Junior High Oral History Project. (Amy Ryan/FOR THE WAUSAU DAILY HERALD)