



EVAN SMOAK | THE JOURNAL

Six Mile Mayor James Atkinson welcomes folks to the town's annual Memorial Day event.

Town of Six Mile remembers fallen

BY EVAN SMOAK
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SIX MILE — Even though the federally recognized day for Memorial Day has come and

gone, one town held true to the holiday's roots on Friday.

The town of Six Mile holds its annual Me-

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memorial Day event on May 30 — regardless of if it's the last Monday of May, or not.

A brochure handed out during the event read, "Originally known as Decoration Day, it was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, following the Civil War, as a time for Americans to decorate the graves of fallen Union soldiers with flowers ... The town of Six Mile chooses to celebrate this date on May 30 to ensure that it does not get lost in with the three-day weekend and to ensure that this National Day of Mourning is honored and remembered on its accord."

Tom von Kaenel, founder of the Semper Fi Barn near Six Mile and Friday's event host, had powerful words about the importance of the holiday.

"Memorial Day is the most sacred day that we have in terms of the secular, non-religious holidays, because without Memorial Day, there would not be a fourth of July, there would not be a Labor Day, there would not be a Veterans Day, there would not be a Christmas or an Easter or any other religious holiday, because the Memorial Day is to remember those that died wearing the cloth of our nation," von Kaenel said. "It's important that we have it today rather than Monday, because somewhere in the rush of a three-day weekend, people start to think about



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The Six Mile area boasts the most Medal of Honor recipients per capita in the country.

Memorial Day as something that is happy and it is not happy. It should be remembered with respect and with honor."

During the event, two men — Ted Shehan and Tom Smith — spoke to the dozens of attendees about soldiers who gave their life for their country during the Vietnam War. Shehan remembered Warrant Officer Ephraim Rutledge 'Rut' Liles II of Pickens who died while serving on July 4, 1969.

"Rut wanted to serve his country, and he tried to join the army, but he failed the physical," Shehan said. "Some people would have been tickled to death ... not Rut. Some men in this country were about to be drafted or were heading north to Canada — not many in Pickens County, I'm proud to say. Rut had surgery at his own expense in order to pass the army physical.



Ted Shehan speaks about fallen soldier Ephraim Rutledge 'Rut' Liles II.

Rut wanted to go to helicopter school. He was accepted, and upon graduation, he was commissioned as a warrant officer. Rut was in Vietnam less than two weeks before he and two other crew members were shot down by enemy fire, and he and the other crew members died in the crash."

Smith remembered his childhood friend, David Donovan Davenport Jr. of Taylors.

"David was drafted in the United States Army," Smith said. "He went to boot camp in advance of infantry in December of 1966. We were both home for Christmas (and) a small group gathered in the neighborhood to catch up. That was the last time I ever saw or spoke to David. His unit shipped out to Vietnam and was in the country soon after the first of the year. PFC Davenport was in the First Infantry Division, first battalion, 18th infantry Charlie Company. On Feb. 5, 1967, David's unit was moving a mine perimeter and one exploded. It ended my friend's life."

The event also included a wreath presentation, a remembrance bell ceremony and the raising of the flag from half-mast back to its normal position.



Tom von Kaenel speaks during Friday's Memorial Day event in Six Mile.

The remembrance bell ceremony was conducted to remember the two men spoken about during the ceremony, the four medal of honor recipients in Pickens County — all who have ties to the Six Mile Area — and all the other men who died while serving this country.

The event was put on by the town in conjunction with the Fleet Reserve and Pickens County Veterans Council.