



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Maisie Mater helps furl flags at Santa Cruz Memorial Park on Monday afternoon.

Avenue of Flags honors the fallen

Elks, Boy Scouts
fly Stars and Stripes
to remind public of sacrifice

By JORY JOHN

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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Elks Lodge, local Boy Scouts and members of the general public honored veterans Monday by placing hundreds of American flags around the Santa Cruz Memorial Cemetery.

The “Avenue of Flags” — which were set up in rows at 6:30 a.m. and removed at 3:30 p.m. — came from the returning caskets of Elks Lodge veterans who died during wartime, from World War I, onward. The donated flags, each featuring the name, rank, and branch of military service of a local veteran, are stored at the Elks Lodge during the year, and removed on Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day and Flag Day.

Throughout the day, families sat near the graves of loved ones, strolled the grounds admiring the patriotic display, or simply pulled over to the side of the road for a few moments. Some families stayed for hours at a time, chatting, taking pictures, or just sitting quietly.

Irene Holombo strolled the cemetery grounds with her husband, father, and children. Holombo said that while many people have barbeques and go to the beach on Memorial Day, she thought it was important for her children, Lily, 7, and Nick, 13, to recognize the magnitude of the sacrifice that those in the military have made.

“We came out to remember and hon-

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Memorial Day visitors to Santa Cruz Memorial Park walk the Avenue of the Flags on Monday afternoon.

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or the young men and women who go to war for our country," she said. "It's to remember, to mourn, and to inform our children. We're teaching our children about war, that it's not just clips on TV, that it's not this pre-packaged thing."

Holombo's father, Peter Tsouprake, a retired Air Force colonel who earned a Silver Star during two tours of duty in Vietnam, said Memorial Day is a chance for him to reflect on his time in the Air Force and the friends he lost.

"I had some good friends I lost in Vietnam, including a young officer, a very good friend," Tsouprake said, sitting on a wall, as flags blew in the breeze behind him. "I lost about 10 good friends in that war."

Nearby, Terry McCormac, a Santa Cruz resident, visited the cemetery with his father Norman,

a World War II veteran. They stood quietly near the grave of Terry's mother. Terry McCormac said that he brings his father to the cemetery each year on Memorial Day.

"It makes you think about how lucky we are," Terry McCormac said. "We come down here each year, visit my mom and enjoy this display."

"I think it's a great thing," added Norman McCormac, 97, speaking quietly.

Santa Cruz Elks Lodge Exalted Ruler Kyle York, who helped organize the Avenue of Flags, said that he was happy with the amount of people who wanted to take part in the setup and takedown. York said that he was proud that the lodge was in charge of facilitating this tradition, which dates back more than five decades.

"This is what this country is all about," York said. "All of these flags represent people who really did the service, who sacrificed their lives for our freedom."

York's son, Alex, 15, has been a part of the flag ceremony for the past five years. Alex said that he considered it an honor to be a part of the annual Memorial Day tradition.

"It felt good knowing that I was a part of this, helping to honor people," he said.

Eric Aasen, a Santa Cruz firefighter and Elks Lodge member, took part in the ceremony, before helping serve food at the Elks Lodge Memorial Day celebration.

"This significance of this is maintaining a sense of patriotism, honoring our veterans, our country and the values that we stand for," Aasen said. "And any patriotic act we do to instill those values in our kids is great."

Les Yeffa, who has been an Elks Lodge member for 46 years, said that the tradition predates him, and that he knew a number of people being honored.

"This means we have not forgotten those who fought and died for our country," Yeffa said.