FREEDOM ROCK MEMORIAL HONORS FALLEN WWII HERO WALTER FICK

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By Heather Rule

Lyle and Pam Kreig didn't know what a Freedom Rock was until they came across one while traveling in Iowa. The Freedom Rock is a large boulder painted by artist Ray "Bubba" Sorensen II and placed on a site honoring Veterans.

"It's a memorial, a rock, to honor or memorialize veterans," Pam said. "It's made because of Veterans."

Vergas has a Freedom Rock now, too. It was completed right before Looney Days in August 2024 and is incorporated into the Veterans Memorial in town located near the baseball diamond on County Road 4. There's a gazebo surrounding the Freedom Rock since they wanted to protect the rock from the weather.

The Freedom Rocks, painted by Sorensen II, were established in 1999 in Iowa. Sorensen II was inspired by the movie "Saving Private Ryan" and his desire to give Veterans unique recognition.

There are more than 100 Freedom Rocks painted in Iowa, at least one in each county of the state. The artist wanted to branch out to paint Freedom Rocks in other states. The Freedom Rock in Vergas is rock No. 8 in Minnesota so far. What's unique about the Freedom Rocks is there's always a story behind what's painted on the rock, usually a tale that pertains to the local area and a particular Veteran.

The Vergas story surrounding its Freedom Rock is about Walter Fick, a Vergas native and Silver Star veteran who was killed in World War II. Fick's brother was also killed in the war five months later. The artist researched the area and found Fick's name on one of the pillars at the Veterans Memorial. That helped him develop the idea of who to honor on the Vergas Freedom Rock.

There's a portrait of Walter Fick painted on the Freedom Rock, along with a USS Minnesota ship, a Blackhawk helicopter, an eagle, a loon and an American flag. There's also a quote on the rock: "All Gave Some, Some Gave All."

The Kreigs are Lions members and part of the seven-person committee that implemented the Veterans Memorial in Vergas, and later the Freedom Rock as part of the memorial.

For more information about the Freedom Rock Tour: https://www.thefreedomrock.com/50statefreedomrocktour/

For more information about the Vergas Veterans Memorial: https://www.facebook.com/groups/vergasveterans/

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