

WEST BRIGHTON

Agent Orange victims honored



Two monuments unveiled Sunday at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Castleton Corners show a brief history of the Vietnam War and a dedication to the victims of Agent Orange. Paul Liotta, Staten Island Advance photos

Staten Island's chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) unveiled the latest additions to the borough's Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Castleton Corners on Sunday.

They unveiled two new monuments — one with a brief history of the Vietnam War and another dedicated to the victims of Agent Orange — at the park in front of the Staten Island Armory at the intersection of Manor Road and Martling Avenue.

VVA Chapter 421 President Gene DiGiacomo said the new monuments are the latest additions to a broader renewal project for the park that began more than a decade ago after it had fallen into disrepair.

"I want to have it so that future generations can know what it was all about," he said. "I also want a place that will also tell the story and the plight of the men and women who fought in Vietnam."

Other improvements at the site during DiGiacomo's tenure as president have

included repaving the sidewalk around the park, the installation of paving stones in the park, and a 5-inch-thick piece of Indian granite designed to resemble the chapter's crest.

DiGiacomo thanked the other members of the chapter's executive board — Vice President Nicky Castoro, Treasurer Al Paolucci, and Secretary Frank Russo — and the organization's broader membership. Also in attendance at the unveiling were the Staten Island chapter of Rolling Thunder, Rep. Max Rose (D-Staten Island/South Brooklyn), Assemblyman Michael Cusick (D-Mid-Island), and Surrogate Judge Matthew Titone.

The members of VVA Chapter 421's executive board joined Rose and Sen. Chuck Schumer in July to announced legislation that would add several Agent Orange ailments recognized and covered by the federal government.

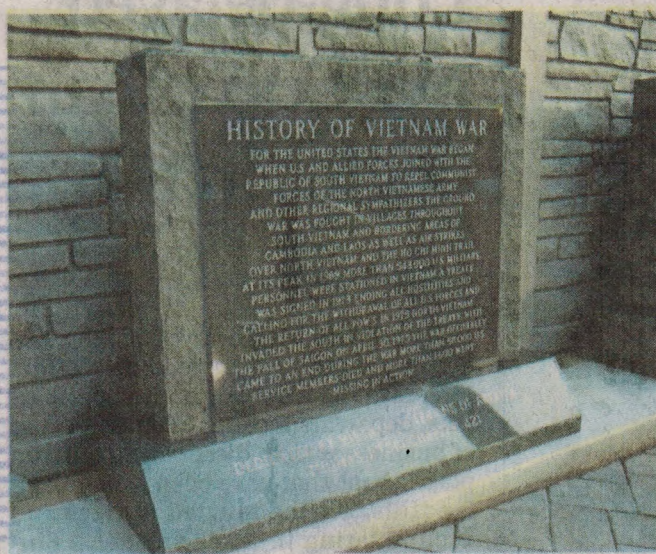
If passed, the National Defense Authori-

zation Act for 2021 will include provisions for bladder cancer, Parkinson's Disease, and hypothyroidism.

Veteran advocates have long sought coverage for these and other ailments since before and after the passage of the Agent Orange Act of 1991. DiGiacomo said Sunday that the addition of the Agent Orange monument at the park was important to continuing the fight for more coverage for those the chemical affected.

"These are ongoing things that show up and appear years later. I've got guys coming down with things and it's related to Agent Orange," he said. "They should've done this years ago."

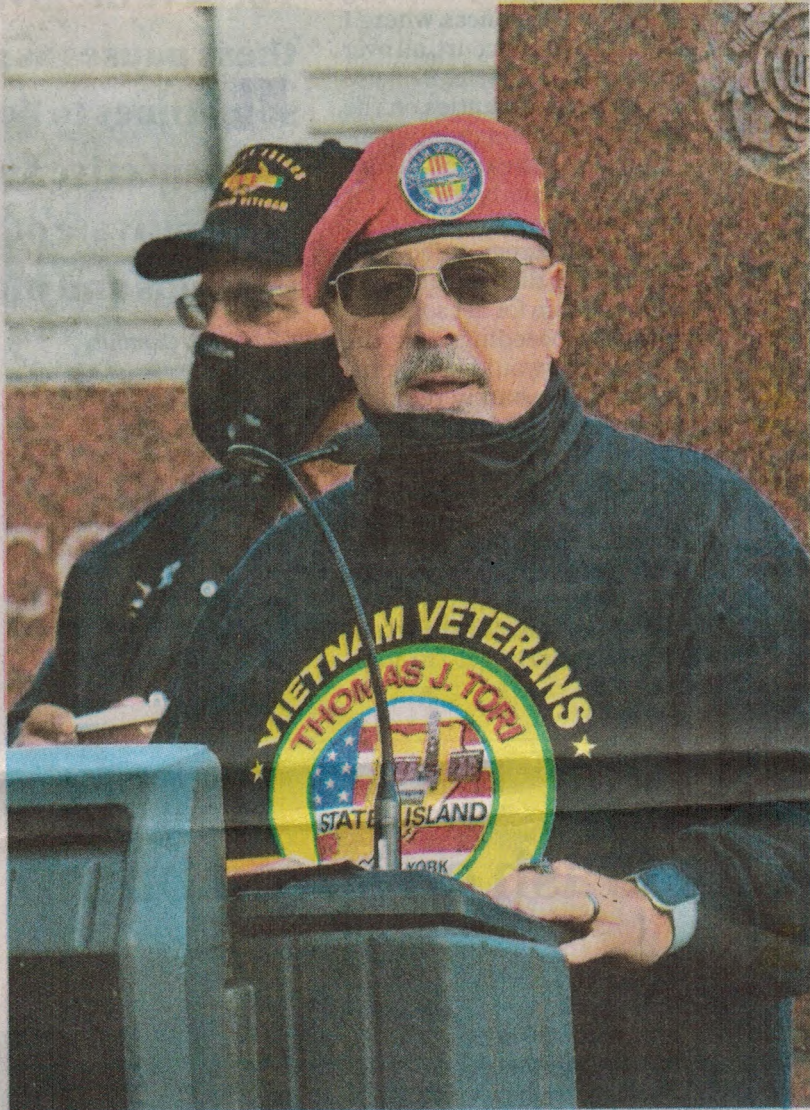
DiGiacomo said his VVA chapter hopes to continue to improve the memorial park in Castleton Corners, and that next they would like to install a crest for prisoners of war and the service members who didn't return home from the war.



One of the new monuments gives a brief history of the Vietnam War.



Vietnam veterans observe the new monuments.



Gene DiGiacomo, president of the Staten Island Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America, addresses a crowd that gathered for the unveiling of two new monuments on Sunday at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Castleton Corners. *Paul Liotta, Staten Island Advance photos*