

LOCAL NEWS

WATERFRONT



Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News

The region's first monument honoring Hispanic-American military veterans was unveiled Friday at the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park. Jose Pizarro, center, chairman of the local memorial committee, pays tribute to all Hispanics who have served. For a photo gallery, go to BuffaloNews.com.

Hispanic vets monument stands out

By DEIDRE WILLIAMS
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

It's hard to miss the new memorial on Buffalo's waterfront that honors Hispanic American military veterans.

In front of the USS The Sullivans at the Naval and Military Park, the memorial is alongside other veteran memorials recognizing Irish and Polish veterans.

But what stands out in the Hispanic Americans memorial is the woman soldier standing alongside a comrade as they pay a final tribute to a fallen soldier.

"This is a unique monument. We are the only one ... that has a male and female soldier," said Jose C. Pizarro, chairman of the Hispanic American Veterans of Western New York Memorial Committee.

Pizarro was among dozens of committee members, residents, elected officials and community and business leaders who gathered Friday for the unveiling ceremony. The statue is one of only six Hispanic monuments of its kind in the country, Pizarro said.

"This is history," said Zaida Gonzalez, a West side resident.

Along with fellow veteran Ven-

tura J. Colon, Pizarro came up with the idea of the tribute to the region's Hispanic veterans.

The \$2 million memorial features life-sized bronze figures of an infantryman kneeling in front of the Battlefield Cross, representing a soldier killed in action, accompanied by a female soldier.

At the bottom are a pair of combat boots that represent the last march of the battle.

The sculpture rests on a black granite ellipse, which symbolizes eternity. The outer edge of the ellipse features engraved flags that represent the United States and 21 Latin American countries.

The ellipse sits atop a black granite octagonal base with the inscription, "In Gratitude to All WNY Hispanic-American Veterans for Their Service."

Emblems of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard also are engraved.

Also recognized at the memorial are a mostly Hispanic infantry and American Legion Post.

The 65th Infantry Regiment was created in 1899 and was predominantly Puerto Rican. Nicknamed "The Borinque-

neers," the unit participated in missions during World War I, World War II and the Korean War and was decorated with more than 10 Distinguished Service Crosses, 258 Silver Stars, 628 Bronze Stars and 2,771 Purple Hearts.

The outfit also received two Presidential Unit Citations, one Meritorious Unit Commendation and two Republic of Korea Citations.

The Gabriel A. Rodriguez American Legion Post 1928, which no longer exists, was established in 1985 and was recognized as the first Hispanic American Legion in Western New York.

Niagara Council Member David A. Rivera provided a \$10,000 grant as seed money.

Mayor Byron W. Brown and the eight other Common Council members also contributed to the cause. Assemblymen Sean Ryan and Felix Ortiz secured \$100,000 for the project on a reimbursement basis, and Key and M&T banks, Great Lakes Health System of WNY, Catholic Health System, and Waterfront Healthcare Center also contributed toward the project.

email: dswilliams@buffnews.com