

Remembering our Veterans this Memorial Day

By Dennis McCarthy, Columnist
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Bert Dorosy slowly sets up his card table covered in red paper poppies in front of Ralph's supermarket in Chatsworth Friday morning.



I say slowly because, at 85 and in poor health, everything Bert does these days he does slowly.

The World War II veteran makes room on the table for his donation can, opens a folding chair, and sits down. He's officially open for business. Memorial Day is coming and the poppy chairman of VFW Post 2805 is back on the front lines again. For the past 20 years, he and his post buddies have covered the Canoga Park and Chatsworth area selling these buddy poppies for a \$1 donation so people can wear one on Memorial Day.

From World War I on, the poppy has become the true symbol of all those who have given their lives fighting our nation's wars. The money in those donation cans goes to charitable programs on behalf of needy and disabled veterans, and to the widows and orphans of deceased veterans.

Nationwide, more than \$1.5 million is raised every year from selling these buddy poppies made by disabled veterans for Memorial Day, according to VFW officials. But this year it's different for Bert. This year his job is much tougher. Apathy and old age among the remaining 40 or so active members of Post 2805 have made the poppy chairman a one-man show.

"It's just me out here selling this year," Bert says. "I don't know how I'm going to do it and take care of my wife who's sick and needs me." In the 15 years I've known this gentle, proud man, he's never asked for help. He's always been the man others asked.

If you've ever seen the beautiful VFW Veterans Memorial at the Chatsworth Train station, that's Bert's baby. He led the effort to get it done. And now he was close to tears Friday telling me he's applied to move with Lee, his wife of 60 years, to the California Veterans Home in Barstow because he needs help caring for her. "I just can't do it myself anymore. I don't know what else to do." While we talk, Ron Ariso walks up and sticks a folded dollar bill in the donation can, taking a poppy. "Vietnam," he says. "World War II," Bert answers. "What's left of us." It's mainly older people who buy his poppies now because they know the meaning behind them, Bert says. "The younger people don't unless they had a daddy or grandfather in a war."

The Canoga Park Women's Club has bought 50 poppies and offered to help Bert sell others, but that's it so far. His "last hurrah," as he calls it, will be at the three-day Greek Festival at Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, 9501 Balboa Blvd., Northridge, on Memorial Day weekend.

Bert leads the official Pledge of Allegiance at the festival and in return gets a free booth to sell his poppies. Stop by and buy a few. Better yet, if you own a business or are a member of a big group or club, give Bert a call and buy a bushel.

Give them to your friends or employees to wear on Memorial Day. That's what Bert really needs, a little sales help, but he's too proud to ask. I'm not.

Dennis McCarthy's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. dennis.mccarthy@dailynews.com, 818-713-3749