

MAY 28, 2002

County pauses to honor fallen

AMERICAN FLAGS FLY PROUDLY IN REMEMBRANCE

Memorial Day more than barbecues, picnics

Staff reports

With reverence for the dead and respect for those who honor them, hundreds of Salinas-area residents gathered Monday at flag-filled cemeteries to pause and give thanks.

In the forefront at each event: a reminder that Memorial Day is a day for more than just barbecues and picnics.

"It is not a day of department store sales and grocery store specials," said Assemblyman Simon Salinas, who spoke to about 150 people Monday morning at the Garden of Memories in south Salinas.

"... We owe a debt beyond payment to the fallen and to the living for their lasting testament to that contribution."

The Castroville District Cemetery near Moss Landing, the Colton Hall Lawn in Monterey, the King City cemetery and the Queen of Heaven Cemetery just north of Salinas — all were settings for solemn remembrance.

About 100 people came to Queen of Heaven,



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Bradley Clark, right, helps his father, Pete, put up flags Monday morning at the Garden of Memories in Salinas as part of a Memorial Day observance.

where a 10 a.m. Mass at the mausoleum preceded a ceremony that included a 21-gun salute by Army and Navy servicemen and women.

"We are volunteering to do this," said Army Pvt. Christopher Conner, a crypto-linguist student at the Defense Language

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About Memorial Day

Inspired by Southern women who placed flowers on the graves of both Confederate and Union soldiers, an organization of Union veterans in 1868 declared May 30 to be Decoration Day. Not until after World War I was it expanded to those who have died in all American wars. In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday.



Bagpiper George Rosu, left, plays 'Amazing Grace' at the Memorial Day observance at Queen of Heaven Cemetery. In the background is the American Legion Riders group.

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Institute in Monterey. "We haven't been assigned."

About 15 motorcycle riders from the American Legion Riders, 28th District, Post 593, circled the grounds.

American Legion Post 593 from Prunedale displayed 300 American flags around the cemetery grounds, each flag printed with the name, date of birth and service of fallen veterans.

Among those in attendance was Veronica Tiscareno of San Diego, whose brother-in-law Capt. Matthew Bancroft was killed Jan. 9 when a refueling plane he was piloting crashed in Pakistan.

Tiscareno was overwhelmed at the sound of "Taps" played by a lone U.S. Army bugler. She said Memorial Day means more to her now than ever before.

"You know what it means, but you don't understand the significance ... until you are hit personally," she said.

Vietnam veteran Jack Cook, who fixed a California flag to his 2001 Harley Davidson Dynawide Glide motorcycle, also reflected on the holiday's importance.

"The support that the living give," Cook said, "is what this is all about."

In King City, more than 200 flags decorated the city cemetery thanks to Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6747.

A ceremony there included an invocation from the Rev. Ron Green of St. John's Catholic Church and a reading of the poem, "The Unknown Soldier," by Mayor John Myers.



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U.S. Army Pvt. Jason Blanenheim, right, plays 'Taps' Monday after a 21-gun salute at a Memorial Day observance at Queen of Heaven Cemetery.

Putting up and taking down all those flags is a major undertaking that itself takes military-style coordination and planning.

At 7 a.m., about 40 volunteers from Salinas Post 31 of the American Legion were out unfurling 843 flags at Garden of Memories in a foggy mist.

They would be back at it nine hours later, folding and preparing to properly store the large

cotton flags — all casket colors donated by late veterans' families.

"I say we are the custodian flags," said the post's outgoing commander Syl Frontczak. "We don't own them."

For many of the families who attended the ceremonies, their presence was a way of personally honoring their loved ones' own dedication and patriotism.

Lourdes Marzo and Carmen Marcos both said their veteran husbands always attended the event before their deaths, Marzo in 1994 and Marcos in 2001.

"When my husband was alive, he never missed this," Marcos said.

Californian staff writer KELLY NIX and south county correspondent POLLY KENNEDY contributed to this report.