



Tribute to a hero City dedicates skating rink for late Vietnam soldier Peter W. Foote

By Susan Bush

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Transcript Correspondent

NORTH ADAMS -- A natural leader known for fairness and compassion, city native Peter W. Foote had already set examples of excellence before he sacrificed his life to save another during the Vietnam conflict.

On Saturday, over 150 individuals gathered to dedicate the city-managed South Church Street skating venue as the Peter W. Foote Vietnam Veterans Skating Rink.

Foote was killed on Jan. 30, 1968, after being wounded while rescuing another wounded soldier. Despite his own wound, Foote reached the comrade, performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on the man and then dragged him to safety. Just moments after getting his friend to safety, Foote was shot again and died. He was posthumously awarded a Silver Star and Purple Heart for his actions. Foote, a member of the Drury High School Class of 1965, left the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus to enlist in the Army.

The decision to name the rink in Foote's honor came during former city Mayor John Barrett III's tenure, and during the ceremony, Barrett termed the dedication his "final act as mayor," although he left office in January.

The dedication honors Foote for his heroism while acknowledging his athletic abilities, Barrett noted.

"He was of my generation," Barrett said. "We played ball together on an American Legion team. He shined in so many ways."

Mayor Richard Alcombright publicly thanked those attending the event.

"How

fitting to name the rink for one of the greatest athletes to ever grace the athletic fields of Berkshire County," he said.

Foote's best friend, Joseph Ames, 63, of Amherst, spoke offered memories of "Pete" prior to the dedication. Ames is founder of the Peter W. Foote Memorial Scholarship, which has provided a \$500 scholarship annually to both a male and female Drury graduate for 42 years.

"The Footes lived on Lawrence Street, which isn't even there anymore," Ames recalled. "I was always over there. Pete was fun, he was witty, and we talked about everything, from teachers to girlfriends to things I can't tell you about. Being an athlete came naturally to him. And everybody liked him."

During the dedication, Ames recalled Foote's large appetite. During a family vacation to Hampton Beach, he said Foote's father spied a restaurant menu item describing an extremely large banana-

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split dessert with a disclaimer. The disclaimer stated that anyone who could eat the entire thing would not have to pay for it.

"To hear his father tell this story, tears would roll from laughing," Ames said. "The waiter comes and puts this gigantic thing in front of this skinny kid with the crew cut and big ears, and Pete ate that thing in record time. He got a standing ovation."

Ames said his own military enlistment came after Foote's death.

"Avenge is probably the right word," he said. "I wanted to avenge the death of my friend."

Ames earned a combat medic badge and a combat infantryman's badge as well as a Bronze Star and Purple Heart during his term of military service.

Foote's nephew and namesake Peter Ferris, 36, of Orlando, Fla., attended the dedication with family members.

"I grew up around here and I played sports," he said. "One of the memories that comes to mind is people realizing that I was Pete Foote's nephew and telling me how great of an athlete he was. He is definitely my ultimate hero."

Foote's death left a deep family void that has never quite closed, Ferris said.

"That's what dissuaded me from the military, I think -- I saw all that pain."

Foote's sister Paula Geary, who lives in Stephentown, N.Y., said the dedication was a source of pride and emotional pain.

"I'm very proud of my brother," she said. "Yet this is bittersweet."

Foote's cousin James "Jim" Rand said he remembered pitching alongside Foote for the Drury High School varsity baseball team.

"He was definitely a man who stood by the little guy," Rand said. "I was in the Mediterranean when I heard he was killed and it was ... it was hard."

Foote had a fondness for motor scooters, Rand recalled.

"He had this Vespa scooter and he loved it," Rand said. "He didn't know how to drive it, but he loved it."

Dedication speakers included city Veteran's Agent Richard "Dick" McCarthy, Chaplain Guy B. Hodgkins of the New England Chapter of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, Michael Montie, vice president of National Sky Soldiers, and Foote's nephew Jared Geary.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, a plaque honoring Foote was presented to family members. Dalton American Legion Post 155 served as Color Guard, and Post 155 members also delivered a three-volley tribute. Kathy Carbone sang The National Anthem, and Drury High School Marching Band members played several selections.

Montie told those assembled that Foote did not live long enough to see a man walk on the moon, send an e-mail or watch the Boston Red Sox baseball team claim a World Series championship, but he will be long remembered.

Foote's legacy of heroism impacts the generations

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that came before him and after him, said Kirby Wissman, Drury High School marching band percussionist.

"I look up to Peter Foote," Wissman said. "My Great Uncle Ronald Wissman died in Vietnam doing the same kind of thing and I look up to him, too. I plan on joining the Army, so something like this is really meaningful to me."

Color Guard member Homer Ouellette of Pittsfield, who fought during World War II and the Korean War, said Foote's actions at the time of his death emphasize courage.

"As time goes by, sometimes people forget guys like him, but we [veterans] don't," Ouellette said. "God bless him and all the others like him. Where does that kind of courage come from?"

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