

## RY COUNTY

# Vet envisions chopper stationed above park

*The township has responded favorably to the idea but wants to check with its insurance company about liability.*

BY JODI SPIEGEL ARTHUR  
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For nearly a quarter century, Vietnam War veteran Ralph Storti has held onto a newspaper clipping showing a military helicopter displayed on a curved pole about 15 feet in the air.

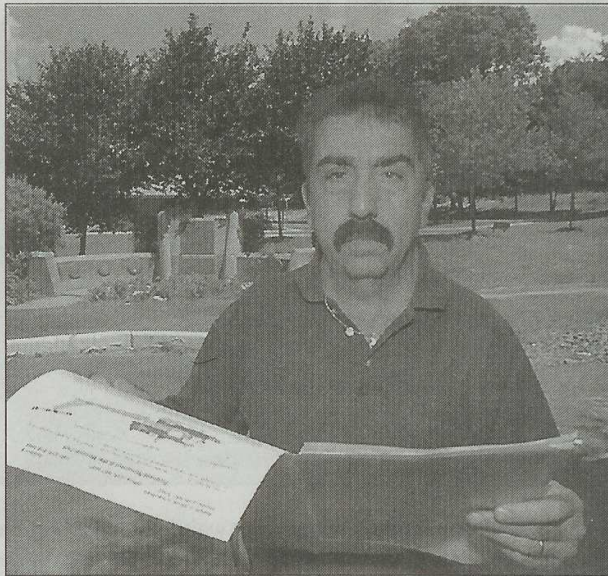
The helicopter serves as a memorial in the town of Porterville, Calif., which, according to the clipping, suffered the highest per capita loss of service personnel in that state during the Vietnam War, six times the national average.

Now Storti, of Willow Grove, is hoping to replicate the Porterville memorial in his hometown, with one noteworthy difference: He wants to place a Vietnam War-era or later helicopter on a straight pole — at least 40 feet above War Memorial Park.

“My concern is at 15 feet, kids will go up the pole and vandalize it,” the Navy veteran said Monday. “I want to minimize the potential for vandalism.”

In addition, Storti said, he wants the helicopter — positioned as though it’s coming in for a landing above the park off Mineral Avenue — to become a landmark for Willow Grove. “I want it to be something that’s a fitting tribute to veterans and something the community can be proud of.”

Storti has brought his idea to



Gian Luiso/The Intelligencer

**Ralph Storti, a Vietnam veteran from Upper Moreland,** wants to put a retired military helicopter in the township’s War Memorial Park.

the Upper Moreland commissioners to make certain they did not object and the township would agree to maintain the helicopter once it is installed. He has since formed a committee — representatives from veterans’ groups, businesses and community service organizations and the township.

“Generally it seems like a good idea,” said Richard Booth, chairman of the township commissioners. “I guess we just want to have a little bit of time to check with our insurance company and make sure there’s support for it everywhere” in the community.

Storti said the 57-foot-long Bell UH-1D helicopter, or “Huey” as it was nicknamed and made famous during the Vietnam War, would be rid of its working parts, including the engine and weapons, and the blades would be rendered motionless.

Decommissioning the helicopter will cost \$3,254, but it is otherwise free, he said.

“My hope is that we’d be able to do it with just the private sector, not involving taxpayer dollars,” Storti said, but conceded, “I can’t preclude having to come back to the township for something.”

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