

# Splash of pride, pipes, puddles 📷

In steady rain, Memorial Day parade marchers and watchers show their appreciation for those who served

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They mustered in the rain on Monday.

From grand marshals Anthony Mariano and Jeffrey Fudin at the front of the line to Cohoes Marching Band at the end, the steady showers could not stop Albany's Memorial Day parade.

The mournful notes of bagpipes resounded through the empty streets as the parade units prepared to march down Central Avenue at 9:45 a.m. They finished about an hour later outside the state Education Building on Washington Avenue. Most of the audience had gathered there, no more than two deep for half a block. Many came to watch their children and grandchildren march.

"It might rain on our parade, but we're still going to be here," said Louise Shadlock, whose grandson Matthew Hall, 15, was in the contingent from Christian Brothers Academy. Shadlock stood in one of the driest spots along the route, between massive marble columns under the eaves of the Education Building. The rain only reached her when the wind shifted.

"There have been some really cold ones, but this is the rainiest," said Dan McGee, a 16-year-old junior at the Christian Brothers Academy. He and his fellow cadets marched in step through the puddles in their dress uniforms.

The boys were soaked to the skin.

"My feet are wet," McGee said.

"Just remember what you are doing it for," said sophomore Greg Coonley, 16. The rain even seeped through his cap, matting his short blond hair. "We have a moral obligation, no matter what."

Other ensembles in the procession included Chocolate Thunder, the Mohonasen High School and Rensselaer's Yankee Doodle bands, color guards for the four branches of the military, Girl Scout troops and Veterans for Peace.

Mariano and Fudin, pharmacists at Stratton VA Medical Center Hospital, were honored as grand marshals for their courage as whistle-blowers who warned that cancer patients at the VA were unduly suffering during cancer research.

Persevering through Monday's inclement weather was another testament to their support for men and women who served in the armed forces. "It shows our dedication," Mariano said.

He had some protection from the elements that many of the participants did not -- an umbrella. Standing beside Mariano was one of those who did: County Executive Mike Breslin. The West Point graduate and Vietnam veteran, however, recalled the rigid rules of the military that would have prevented this creature comfort. "It was forbidden to have an umbrella in the Army," Breslin said.

Later, at the 1 p.m. North Greenbush parade, Al MacRoberts was not about to carry an umbrella.

"I fought in the war. This is nothing," said MacRoberts, commander of American Legion Post 1489 in Wynantskill. "I was in Vietnam, monsoons and everything. We don't carry umbrellas. We didn't carry them then."

MacRoberts said the marchers all agreed that they would not shield themselves from the elements as a sign of support for the troops. "We're all veterans. We're here to honor these people we did lose, and further on, we are going to lose more," he said. "War or peacetime, you've got to honor them."

Spectators stood under umbrellas or sat in parked cars or the open hatches of minivans to watch veterans, Scouts, pipe bands, the Uncle Sam Chorus, and other bands and organizations in the annual parade.

Betty DeThomasis of East Greenbush had a little grandmotherly fairness in mind for being at the parade.

"My grandson marched with the Army -- he's a junior cadet -- in the St. Patrick's Day parade," she said. "My granddaughter is marching in this one with the Girl Scouts."

Her son-in-law, John Collins, said it was important not to skip the Memorial Day parade.

"Rain or shine, you can't ruin the spirit," he said. "I wouldn't be out here if it was just another parade."

Ashley Collins, a Brownie who marched with her troop-leader mother Michelle and nine other members, was still smiling at parade's end. She took turns riding in a car and walking in the rain, and she said her favorite part was when she saw her friends watching her from the sidelines.

Like many families, the Collins family parked their minivan with its rear facing the street. John Collins sat with his son, Matthew, 4, inside the back with the hatchback opened up.

Jim Mahalko, who served in the Air Force from 1969 to 1973 in Iceland, came out to watch the parade in memory of some of his contemporaries who died in Southeast Asia.

"I have a lot of friends and relatives who passed away during the wars. I came out to honor them," he said. "Some of the guys I went in with went to Vietnam and didn't come home."