

## Stars and Stripes in Secaucus

Recent events in the Middle East have hopefully reminded most of us about the sacrifice and selflessness of the United States Armed Forces. Both President Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently highlighted this issue as they addressed soldiers at two different military bases, pointing out that this country cannot be great without the courage, dedication, and skill of the American military and intelligence professionals. The Town of Secaucus takes great pride in its rich history of residents who have bravely served and continue to serve in past and present conflicts around the world, and we hope that everyone will come out and help celebrate these individuals and the values and qualities that our current military leaders have so aptly recognized.

This year's Memorial Day Parade will take place on Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, beginning at the high school at noon and ending at the American Legion Hall at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Centre Ave. As our theme this year is "Hometown Heroes," it's very fitting that Luke Smentkowski will serve as the Grand Marshal. A Secaucus native and U.S. Marine, Mr. Smentkowski has earned various medals, including a purple heart for the significant injuries he sustained during his second tour of duty in the Iraq War. Along with Mr. Smentkowski, we will pay homage to all who have bravely served this country, some of whom return with injuries and mental scars, some of whom never return at all. Among those we have the honor to call our friends and neighbors will be veterans of World War II, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, as well as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although this year's Memorial Day parade will be just our second in recent memory, it's easy to see that this event will continue to thrive in Secaucus. Registration numbers for participation are up; local organizations have signed on to give their support, and we anticipate an even larger crowd than we saw last year. Among the 1000 plus marchers, there will be former veterans and POWs, marching bands, and a number of local civic and cultural organizations. Vehicle enthusiasts should be excited to note that the National Guard will be in town showing off the equipment they use to keep us safe. To top it off, there will be food, beverages and entertainment available at the American Legion Hall when marching is complete. Whenever I think about this tremendous lineup, my thanks go out to the event coordinators, Mickey and Paulette Halpin. We would definitely not be in this position right now were it not for their hard work and dedication.

One of the more unique features of this parade is something that I happened to stumble across, literally, while I was cleaning out my office during my first few weeks as mayor. What I found and plan to share with you is a scrapbook that documents the World War II experiences of Secaucus residents. It was an amazing find, to say the least, and I plan to make it into a commemorative journal that everyone can enjoy.

I am extremely excited about this event. If you happened to miss last year's parade, or if you're on the fence about coming out on the 21<sup>st</sup>, just think about what Memorial Day really means. Think about those friends, neighbors, and family members who never make it back from these conflicts. Think about what our leaders have told the next generations of soldiers about their courage and patriotism. Think about the fact that some of them - our own children, brothers, sisters - may

never make it back. Please consider all of this and come out for a day of true celebration in honor of those who have made this country...this state...this Town of Secaucus the safest and best place it can possibly be. For more information on this event visit the town web site – [www.secaucusnj.org](http://www.secaucusnj.org).