

Collegedale Veterans Memorial Park completed

BY MIKE O'NEAL
STAFF WRITER

It has taken more than four years and nearly \$1 million, but the Veterans Memorial Park in Collegedale is finished.

Artist Gregory Johnson spent Tuesday afternoon installing a life-size bronze statue of two soldiers — one wounded, the other an unarmed medic giving aid — that serves as the two-acre park's centerpiece.

Park spokesman Mathew Miller said the sculpture "is exciting to me because, while all the other elements are important, this is a piece about humanity."

Charlie Hobbs, recently named the Vietnam Veterans of America's national member of the year, said the park's purpose is not to

celebrate war but to honor veterans, including conscientious objectors.

"It is a tribute to anyone that's ever served," Mr. Hobbs said. "In any branch of the service, there is a sacrifice."

Featured at the park are plaques, monuments and a timeline of conflicts from the War of Independence to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The major branches of service — Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Merchant Marine and Air Force — are commemorated. Military hardware, including an M48 Patton tank and a Cobra attack helicopter, are on display.

Collegedale commissioner

See MEMORIAL, Page B8



STAFF PHOTO BY TIM BARBER

Sculptor Gregory Johnson prepares to set his work onto a marble slab before the dedication of the final military monument at Collegedale's Veterans Memorial Park on Tuesday.

Memorial

● Continued from Metro

Tim Johnson said parents can tour the park with children "explaining what it means to be a veteran." Mr. Johnson, who was mayor when work on the park was launched in 2001, said Vietnam veteran Phil Garver was "the visionary that made this happen."

Mr. Garver said the park will be a reminder that freedom has its costs, and those in the Armed Services "are the ones who've given us our freedoms."

Mr. Garver said he was a conscientious objector and did not carry a weapon. He served as an unarmed medic with the 4th Infantry Division in the mid-1960's.

Mr. Miller said the sculpture expresses the convictions of community residents.

"This piece resonates because Collegedale is very much a community rooted in faith and the fellowship of mankind," he said. "Many in this community were conscientious objectors who went into harm's way unarmed, protected only by their faith."

E-mail Mike O'Neal at moneal@timesfreepress.com