

 **The News-Herald**  
*A Heritage Newspaper*

## Failure to see school site didn't ruin trip

By Francesca Chilargi  
, The News-Herald

One of the main purposes of a recent trip to Southeast Asia for a Vietnam War veteran and others was to see the progress of a junior high school that's under construction.

Because of the communist government's traveling regulations, however, Trenton resident John Craven, his wife, Gail, and 17 others were not able to visit the site.

"Obviously, that was really a letdown for me," Craven said. "It's not that it ruined my trip. It was rather deflating, and I got through that quite quickly."

The visit was tied to the Development of Vietnam Endeavors Fund, known as the DOVE Fund, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that builds schools, medical facilities and water-treatment systems in rural villages for the poorest people.

DOVE Fund members travel to the country annually to check on the progress of their projects.

The organization's board of trustees prides itself on the fact that 100 percent of donations benefit the projects because members cover their own travel expenses, said Craven, a member since 2006.

A dedication ceremony is set for next year for the school, which is expected to open in a few months.

The school also is honoring three men who died on Oct. 4, 1969, while serving in the Vietnam War with Craven in the Army's 70th Combat Engineer Battalion.

Those men were George Davenport Jr., Wayne Elkins and William McLaughlin.

One of Elkins' sons, Wayne Elkins Jr. of Sanford, Maine, created a memorial to pay homage to his dad and wanted to plant it at the camp where he served.

Because he could not visit the compound, he and his wife, Tracy, will try next year to attend the dedication ceremony.

"We met a lot of people there, and we went there for a purpose, to visit the site where my father was at and leave a memorial thing," Elkins said.

Seizing the moment, the group held a symbolic ceremony, a suggestion by Tim Kearney, chairman of DOVE Fund. The group dined at a French restaurant in Dalat, which means "city of love" and is dubbed "Vietnam's little Paris."

Each person around the table gave a personal testimony, Cravens said.

Gail Cravens said the exchange probably was more spiritual and poignant than had they gone to look at the school that's under construction.

Click here to return to story:

[http://thenewsherald.com/stories/033008/loc\\_20080330014.shtml](http://thenewsherald.com/stories/033008/loc_20080330014.shtml)