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Lenny Ogozalek, Vietnam War veteran and longtime community activist, will be the grand marshal of the 2013 Summit Hill Memorial Day Parade

At age 69, Leonard J. "Lenny" Ogozalek isn't ashamed to cry.

"That's what I did," he said, when he was recently asked to serve as grand marshal of the annual Summit Hill Memorial Day Parade.

"Why me?," he asked Tom Vermillion, parade committee chairman, and W. Kevin O'Donnell, commander of American Legion Post 316, when they visited his house at 26 E. White St., Summit Hill, last week to ask him to lead the upcoming parade.

"After all," Lenny said, "There are so many good people in town. I shed a tear. I'm not ashamed to say it, because this is an honor I'll take to my grave with me."

Ogozalek will lead the line of march on Monday, May 27, when Summit Hill hosts Carbon County's largest tribute to our country. He will first participate in the annual Memorial Day festivities at Ludlow Park, and then ring the former Summit Hill High School bell in the park, before climbing in the convertible that will take him around the community as the 2013 guest of honor.

"I still don't believe it," said Ogozalek, as humble a man as you will find. "I was shocked. I really don't know what to expect. All I did (in his lifetime) was volunteer my time and try to help people. Otherwise, I'm usually low-key."

According to Vermillion, whose committee is busy putting together the four-division lineup, Ogozalek fits the honor nicely. He said, "Lenny is the perfect choice to lead the parade. He served our country and has dedicated his life to serving our community. He was selected unanimously by the American Legion and the parade committee members and very humbly accepted. I know he has a wonderful family that is very proud and excited for him. It is well deserved."

Ogozalek said he has participated in the parades many times, either marching with his comrades from Post 316 or with his "brothers" of Diligence Fire Company No. 1. "This will be different," he said. "Let's put it this way: being the grand marshal wasn't on my bucket list, but it's an honor I'll never forget. I will be proud to represent all of the veterans from Summit Hill and Carbon County."

One thing Ogozalek is extremely proud of is the job done by the JROTC organization of Panther Valley High School. A past president of the Panther Valley Band Boosters, he pointed out the unit will be among those joining him in comprising the parade.

"I'm proud of that group," he said, pointing out he recently attended a funeral of his late neighbor, Frank Juracka, at which time the JROTC conducted the service. "The way they presented the colors, and conducted the military services, it made me proud. They bring such a great honor to veterans and I will be happy they will be joining us in the lineup."

Born in Lansford, he is a son of 102-year-old Mrs. Anna (Porambo) Ogozalek, a guest at the Mahoning Valley Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Mahoning Township, and the late Joseph Ogozalek, who in 1949 was killed in the mines when Lenny was only five years old.

Len graduated from the former SS. Peter and Paul Parochial School, Lansford, and in 1961 from Marian High School, after which time he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, serving from 1961-65.

During his military career, the Vietnam War veteran underwent basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and was trained as an air freight handler at Dover Air Force Base in

Delaware, where he was stationed for two years before a two-year assignment in Germany, which culminated with his honorable discharge on Sept. 5, 1965.

Ogozalek returned to his hometown and became employed in the garment industry, leaving that business as a sewing machine mechanic and then securing employment with the Kovatch Corporation, Nesquehoning, where he worked for 25 years before retiring from its upholstery shop.

The grand marshal is married to the former Sandy Miller of Summit Hill. They will observe their 45th wedding anniversary in October. Lenny credits Sandy with a "lifetime of support," saying, "You can never give a wife enough credit and Sandy has always been supportive of whatever I've done."

They are the parents of a son Len, and his wife, the former Lisa Best, of Summit Hill, and a daughter Debbie, wife of Michael Weaver of Nesquehoning. They have five grandchildren, Lenny and Justin Ogozalek and Mercedes, Makayla and Madeline Weaver.

Lenny has a sister, Virginia Zabo of Lansford, and another sibling, Joseph "Buddy," died in 2006.

Ogozalek has been very active in the community in a number of areas, including being a former basketball coach at the former SS. Peter and Paul School, Lansford, and a member of the Summit Hill Community Improvement Organization and the Summit Hill Recreation Commission, where he served for 20 years and was one of the original founders of the Philip Ginter Memorial Run.

He served as president of the Summit Hill Knee-Hi Football Organization and the Panther Valley Band Boosters, before becoming very active as a member of the fire police unit of the Diligence Fire Company No. 1, Summit Hill. A fire policeman for about 15 years, he has held the position of captain for the last decade.

Ogozalek belongs to American Legion Post 316, Summit Hill, and St. Katharine Drexel Catholic

Church, Lansford.

in conjunction with the parade, the parade committee will once again sponsor its annual home decorating contest. Judging by out-of-town visitors will take place on Sunday, May 26.

The details of the memorial services to be held at St. Joseph Cemetery, White Bear, on Sunday, May 26, and in Ludlow Park on Memorial Day will be announced in a future edition of the TIMES NEWS.