The 2018 Johnson County Veterans Day Observance will honor local veterans of the Vietnam War era as its special guests, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Defense’s ongoing 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War.

The celebration is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 10, at Antioch Park, 6501 Antioch Road, Merriam. The observance begins at 11 a.m. and will take place at the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial located within the park complex.

The Veterans Day program traditionally honors all local veterans from all wars with an annual focus of selecting specific veteran groups for special recognition. Korean War veterans were recognized last year, Gold Star families in 2016 and World War II veterans in 2015. The event marks Johnson County’s 32nd annual Veterans Day celebration.

Slightly more than 400 veterans of the Vietnam War era have applied to receive Vietnam War 50th Anniversary lapel pins from the U.S. Department of Defense and a Certificate of Appreciation from Johnson County.

Veterans, who applied for recognition and who are unable to attend the event, are asked to provide Gary Swanson at 913-744-8282/gswanson@kc.rr.com or the Johnson County Manager’s Office at 913-715-0725/pennypearson@jocogov.org an address to mail their pins/certificates after Nov. 10.

Johnson County and nine chapters of the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) have been designated Commemorative Partners by the Defense Department to present the lapel pins and other public recognition to veterans of the Vietnam War era for honorable military service from June 1, 1954 to May 15, 1975.

The event will also feature the Kansas Society Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard, including members from two local chapters. The color guard will be dressed in Colonial attire with muskets and swords.

Featured speakers include Colonel Roger Murdock, chief of the joint staff at the Kansas National Guard, and Jimmie Spencer representing the U.S. Defense Department Vietnam War Commemoration.

Ed Eilert, chairman of the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners, will emcee the program with Denise Bullock serving as chaplain. She is Kansas State DAR chaplain.

Program activities will include:

- Patriotic music and songs by the American Legion Band of Greater Kansas City and the Sweet Adelines;
- Presentation of colors by the Johnson County Sheriff’s Honor Guard;
- Placement of memorial wreaths by local veteran organizations;
- A rifle salute by the VFW Post 7397 in Lenexa; and,
- Playing of “Echo Taps.”

General parking for the Veterans Day event will be on the parking lot of the former Lee Apparel parking lot, 9001 West 67th Street, with free shuttle buses, starting at approximately 10 a.m. and running approximately every 10 minutes, to drop off/pick up near the Vietnam Memorial Plaza. Public parking at the Lee Apparel site is strongly encouraged.

Handicapped parking will be located near the Vietnam Memorial Plaza for residents with limited mobility.

In case of inclement weather, updates will be provided through TV news outlets, facebook (facebook.com/jocogov) and the county’s website (jocogov.org).

The Vietnam Memorial Plaza originally was dedicated on Veterans Day in 1974 and rededicated on Memorial Day 1998. It was the Kansas City metro area’s first public memorial to 57 Johnson County servicemen killed or missing in action from the Vietnam War.

The memorial project was designed and built by concrete artist Leon Lickteig of Greeley, Kan. Lickteig incorporated a dragon in the walkway of the memorial plaza, naming the sculpture, “The Dragon Lives,” along with images of bamboo shoots and leaves.

More details of the Veterans Day celebration will also be available through the county’s website as the event is finalized.