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By: Eric Poole, October 1, 2012

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"Thank God for places like Ellwood City," Altmire said. "The reason that Leslie Sabo became the man that he was, a hero to the entire country, happened in Ellwood City."

A crowd of area residents, veterans and dignitaries were on hand for the local ceremony at Christ Presbyterian Church and Legion Park, where Sabo's brother, George Sabo of Michigan, and his widow, Rose Sabo-Brown of Hickory Township, unveiled a monument to the most decorated soldier in Lawrence County history.

The monument includes text of the 390-word Medal of Honor citation on the front, and a list of the seven other soldiers who died in the attack, now referred to by the Army as the Mother's Day Ambush -- Lawrence DeBoer, James DeBrew, Frederick Harms Jr., Thomas Merriman, Ernest Moore, Donald Smith and Leslie Wilbanks.

Nearly a dozen men who served with Sabo during 1969-70 in Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, also attended the ceremony. Retired Army Capt. James Waybright, commander of Bravo Company during most of Sabo's service, was keynote speaker.

Waybright, on his first visit to Ellwood City, called Sabo one of Bravo Company's "intellectuals" and paid tribute to Sabo's hometown.

"If everyone in Ellwood City is made from the same stuff as Leslie Sabo, you've got a heck of a town," he said.

Sabo was killed on May 10, 1970, during an ambush near the Se San River in Cambodia. According to eyewitness accounts and government records, he led efforts to prevent 50 to 60 Americans from being surrounded, overrun and executed by a much larger North Vietnamese force.

During the ambush, which took place over a period of several hours, records indicate that he exposed himself repeatedly to enemy fire, including a foray to take ammunition from soldiers who had fallen earlier in the day so he and his comrades could continue opposing the enemy.

He was recommended at the time for the Medal of Honor, but the paperwork was lost until 1999, when a fellow Vietnam veteran, Alton "Tony" Mabb of Jacksonville, Fla., discovered Sabo's long-missing personnel file -- which included a proposed Medal of Honor citation -- in the National Archives. On May 16, President Barack Obama awarded the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony.

The original citation had been written by George Koziol, who had been with Bravo Company that day and witnessed his friend's death. During Waybright's speech, he remembered Koziol,

who died of cancer in 2008.

"George, we know you're up there today looking down on us with a tremendous amount of pride," Waybright said, as his voice crackled with emotion.

Ellwood City Area School District Superintendent Frank Aloï, a teacher at Lincoln High School at the time of Sabo's graduation in 1966, delved into his permanent record for an example of the soldier's character. During his time at Lincoln from seventh grade through his senior year, Sabo was tardy only one time.

"He was self-disciplined, dependable and responsible," Aloï said.

Sunday's ceremony is the first of several events to recognize Sabo, Lawrence County's third Medal of Honor recipient and first since the Civil War -- when the award standards were far less stringent than they were in the Vietnam era.

During his speech, Aloï announced that the school district will hold a ceremony Nov. 20 to christen the newly named Leslie H. Sabo Auditorium at Lincoln High School. Lawrence County will have an event on Nov. 11 to officially mark the renaming of Ewing Park Bridge in Sabo's honor.

George Sabo said Sunday's recognition and the monument will ensure that his younger brother, and his sacrifice, will never be forgotten.

"The grief and the loss of my brother will never go away, but this is a happy time for Ellwood City," Sabo said. "The Sabo family is, and forever will be, grateful for this monument."