

Kemper essays look to past, future

By PAIGE RENTZ

Memorials are often viewed as a link to the past, a tool for remembrance, a balm for those who survive. While Richard M. Kemper Park certainly serves as this type of traditional monument, the work of those to whom it is important manage to make it so much more. At last Thursday's Ninth Annual Richard Kemper Memorial Essay Contest ceremony, two Mamaroneck High School students explained in accomplished prose how memorials such as Kemper Park serve the past and future equally.

Paul Cantor, nephew of Richard Kemper, said that with the state of the world today, with wars in the Middle East and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, that it is understandable to feel as if Armageddon is just around the corner. "But remember this, in World War II we fought against the Germans and Japanese, yet today the Germans and Japanese are among our closest allies," he said. "And remember also that we fought in World War II with a segregated army, yet today a black man is President of the United States."

Cantor explained that these observations are evidence that progress toward "a more just and peaceful planet" can and does take place, and for this reason, the Kemper Memorial Essay Contest was established to facilitate such advancement. "Students who participate in the contest honor the soldiers who died on all our battlefields by taking up in their name the struggle to create a world where people no longer harm and kill one another," he said.

The winning essayists, who were chosen from over 30 entries, were presented with \$250 checks from Richard Kemper's sister, Jean Kemper Hoffman, who sponsored the contest for its first eight years. In response to the question, "Why do we build memorials to commemorate those who give their lives for their country?" Addie Nicole Merians explained that memorials such as Kemper Park can make the death tolls and statistics real, "demystif[ing] the large numbers of casualties." Also important, explained Merians, is the way that memorials help ease the trauma and grief of the living and records the noble sacrifice of fallen soldiers, "who stood up for humanity, for morality, for goodness."

It is exactly these sort of values that need to be employed now and in the future, to address the human rights violations Chelsie Walters writes about in her essay on the need for strong action in Darfur. "After millions were killed and tortured during the Holocaust the world made a promise: 'Never again.' This was a promise that world leaders have failed to keep. We need to put words into action or eventually there will be no one left," writes Walters, who called for America to set a "good example for other world powers by sending in large peace-keeping forces to Darfur. If a joint effort is



Jean Kemper Hoffman, Chelsie Walters, Addie Nicole Merians and Paul Cantor pose in front of the Richard M. Kemper Memorial at last Thursday's ceremony.

Photo/ Paige Rentz

made by the world powers, any fight can be won, and any fire extinguished."

This year's contest was sponsored by the newly-established non-profit Kemper

Foundation for Promoting Human Rights Education, which seeks to build an endowment to fund it in the future. For more information, contact paulcantor@hotmail.com.