



### **Grant & Ross Hardester**

### **2026 Middletown Days Grand Marshal Award Winner**

**By: MacKenzie Sheffer**

Being named the 2026 Middletown Days Grand Marshals is more than just an individual honor, it's a recognition for generations of family work and community involvement. This year we are privileged to have the Hardester brothers, Grant and Ross Hardester carry this title. When informed of selection, the brothers said they were surprised yet extremely grateful. "We thought it was very nice that they would think of us," they said.

This name is not only bestowed upon one generation, but three. Hardesters has remained a family business that has served Middletown for decades. The brothers noted that this award has been seen among the family before in previous generations, including their parents.

‘It kind of makes us feel good,’ they say. ‘We’ve been able to carry on to the next generation of being in business with Middletown, and being part of the parade and Central Park.’ Their deep connection to the community isn't a new statement, as Grant started working in the family business as a child in the early 1970's—followed by his brother a few years later. Looking at it, times have changed immensely. They both laugh recalling the fact of earning about 50 cents an hour during those early years.

Their commitment to Middletown extends beyond their business. Over the years, the family has supported countless local sports teams, community organizations, and fundraising efforts. They regularly contribute to Middletown Central Park, the Middletown Lions Club, and numerous events. The family is also known for providing free pool passes to children ages 13 and under each summer. Helping local families enjoy all opportunities and build community connections.

Many of their favorite memories center around Middletown Days. Ross recalls a memory of watching Grant ride horses in the parade, while Grant recalled eagerly participating in horse events as a young boy. Beyond the festivities, the brothers value how the event reunites people across all generations. ‘What I like about Middletown Days is you see people that have moved away, come back to visit. Grant says. ‘It’s a fun time in Middletown to see friends and families reunite’

The brothers believe Middletown has maintained much of its small-town character despite the change that surrounds it. Even with the challenges that are thrown at the community, it has always retained its authentic feeling. ‘It’s just a really good community to be a part of,’ they express, praising the support and dedication of the local residents. They also credited longtime employees and community organizers for helping shape both their business and the town as a whole. Among those they mentioned were longtime employees Dwayne Harper and Gail Wright. As well as mentioning organizations such as the Lions Club and the Central Park board for the hours they have contributed to the community for generations.

As Middletown celebrates its 65th year, the brothers emphasized the importance of preserving local traditions. ‘There’s something about tradition,’ Grant explains, ‘You see the grandparents show up, the great-grandparents show up, and the next generation show up. I don't think there's too many communities that pull off what Middletown Days does.

When asked what advice they'd offer younger generations, the brothers encouraged them to become involved, volunteer, and participate in community events. Looking ahead, they remain optimistic about the future of both Middletown Days and the town itself.

‘It would be great if they just keep doing it. There are so many people who are willing to volunteer year after year.’ The brothers concluded by expressing their gratitude for the honor, and for being picked to represent such a large title.

"We love Middletown Days and love what it represents for the town of Middletown."

This year's celebration will mark another chapter in a tradition that has brought generations of Middletown residents together for 65 years. Thank you Grant and Ross Hardester for all the service you have provided this community with. Your hours, actions, and determination have led our town to where we are today, so as a community- we thank you.