

Did You Know...? *Wreaths Across America* AZ Rider

... That the tradition of an organized laying of wreaths at the Arlington Cemetery tombstones began in 1992?

... That the goal of Wreaths Across America is to place a wreath at the headstone of every Veteran in our National Cemeteries?

... It costs just \$15 per wreath to participate in this most Honorable of undertakings? That's far less than some people spend at the local watering hole... *in an hour...* much less going out for the night.



ans' parade, stopping at schools, monuments, veterans' homes and communities all along the way to remind people how important it is to remember, honor and teach.

Wreaths Across America also conducts several programs to honor our Veterans, including our popular "Thanks a Million" campaign which distributes cards to people all over the country to give Veterans a simple "thank you" for their service. We participate in Veterans' events throughout the year,

The Arlington Story:

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Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, was a 12 year old paper boy for the *Bangor Daily News* when he won a trip to Washington D.C. His first trip to our nation's capital was one he would never forget, and Arlington National Cemetery made an especially indelible impression on him. This experience followed him throughout his life and successful career in business, reminding him that his good fortune was due, in large part, to the values of this nation and the Veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their Country.

In 1992, Worcester Wreath found themselves with a surplus of wreaths nearing the end of the holiday season. Remembering his boyhood experience at Arlington, Worcester realized he had an opportunity to honor our country's Veterans. With the help of Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, arrangements were made for the wreaths to be placed at Arlington in one of the older sections of the cemetery, a section which had been receiving fewer visitors with each passing year.

As plans were underway, a number of other individuals and organizations stepped up to help. James Prout, owner of local trucking company Blue Bird Ranch, Inc., generously provided transportation all the way to Virginia. Volunteers from the local American Legion and VFW Posts gathered with members of the community to decorate each wreath with traditional red, hand-tied bows. Members of the Maine State Society of Washington, D.C. helped to organize the wreath-laying, which included a special ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The annual tribute went on quietly for several years, until 2005, when a photo of the stones at Arlington, adorned with wreaths and covered in snow, circulated around the internet. Suddenly, the project received national attention. Thousands of requests poured in from all over the country from people wanting to help with Arlington, to emulate the Arlington project at their National and State cemeteries, or to simply share their stories and thank Morrill Worcester for honoring our nation's heroes.

Unable to donate thousands of wreaths to

each state, Worcester began sending seven wreaths to every state, one for each branch of the military, and for POW/MIAs. In 2006, with the help of the Civil Air Patrol and other civic organizations, simultaneous wreath laying ceremonies were held at over 150 locations around the country. The Patriot Guard Riders volunteered as escort for the wreaths going to Arlington. This began the annual "Veterans Honor Parade" that travels the east coast in early December.

The annual trip to Arlington and the groups of volunteers eager to participate in Worcester's simple wreath-laying event grew each year until it became clear the desire to remember and honor our country's fallen heroes was bigger than Arlington, and bigger than this one company.

In 2007, the Worcester family, along with veterans, and other groups and individuals who had helped with their annual Veterans wreath ceremony in Arlington, formed Wreaths Across America, a non-profit 501-(c) (3) organization, to continue and expand this effort, and support other groups around the country who wanted to do the same. The mission of the group is simple:

Remember. Honor. Teach.

In 2008 over 300 locations held wreath laying ceremonies in every state, Puerto Rico and 24 overseas cemeteries. Over 100,000 wreaths were placed on veterans' graves. Over 60,000 volunteers participated.

December 13, 2008 was unanimously voted by the US Congress as "Wreaths Across America Day".

In 2014, Wreaths Across America and our national network of volunteers laid over 700,000 memorial wreaths at 1,000 locations in the United States and beyond. We were able to include ceremonies at the Pearl Harbor Memorial, as well as Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and the sites of the September 11 tragedies. We accomplished this with help from 2047 fundraising groups, corporate contributions, and donations of trucking, shipping, and thousands of helping hands. Our goal of covering Arlington National Cemetery was accomplished in 2014 with the placement of 226,525 wreaths.

The wreath laying is still held annually, on the second or third Saturday of December. Our annual pilgrimage from Harrington, Maine to Arlington National Cemetery has become known as the world's largest veter-

ans' parade, stopping at schools, monuments, veterans' homes and communities all along the way to remind people how important it is to remember, honor and teach.

Wreaths Across America also conducts several programs to honor our Veterans, including our popular "Thanks a Million" campaign which distributes cards to people all over the country to give Veterans a simple "thank you" for their service. We participate in Veterans' events throughout the year, and have a Veteran liaison on staff to work with local Veterans organizations.

WAA is committed to teaching younger generations about the value of their freedoms, and the importance of honoring those who sacrificed so much to protect those freedoms. We offer learning tools, interactive media projects, and opportunities for youth groups to participate in our events. We also work to create opportunities to connect "the Greatest Generation" with the "Generation of Hope". The inspirational stories of our World War II Veterans must be passed on to the leaders of the future.

Wreaths Across America would not be successful without the help of volunteers, active organizations and the generosity of the trucking industry. We thank them for working with us to remember the men and women who served our country, honor our military and their families, and teach our children about our freedom and those who protect it.

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Old Guard Riders Phoenix coordinates the wreaths at Phoenix National Cemetery. There are over 58,000 Veterans interred at the National Memorial Cemetery in Phoenix. They were able to place 4,000 wreaths there in 2014. The 2015 goal is 10,000 wreaths; with a 5-year goal to have a wreath for each Veteran there. Fundraising efforts are underway. Donations can be sent in until December 1st for 2015.

In addition to the National Cemetery in Phoenix, there are other Veterans Cemeteries throughout Arizona where similar wreath-laying efforts are taking place.

Nearly 40 different organizations are contributing to the 2015 effort. And it's all happening under the guidance of the Wreaths Across America national program. Find a location near you to support by visiting www.wreathscrossamerica.org

The Wreaths Across America
2015 National Remembrance Ceremonies
will take place on Saturday December 12.

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