

Wreaths Across America gives survivors, loved ones a chance to honor veterans

Written by By Rachel Pfeiffer Sun Correspondent
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It was Christmastime 1992. Wreath maker Morrill Worcester of Harrington, Maine found he had some extra wreaths. Instead of simply getting rid of them, Worcester remembered his visit to Arlington National Cemetery as a young boy. He decided to donate the wreaths, placing them on graves of fallen soldiers.

This became a tradition that continued for years, with organizations and volunteers partnering with Worcester each holiday season to transport and distribute the wreaths at Arlington. In 2005, a picture of the decorated graves ended up on the internet. Suddenly, people across America wanted to honor veterans with these wreaths. The tribute continued to grow, and in 2007, the Worcester family and others established the nonprofit Wreaths Across America.

Last year, Wreaths Across America places around 1.7 million wreaths all over the United States.

Gallup resident Janice Bradley learned about Wreaths Across America on television. She was impressed with the festive, heartfelt tributes and told her brothers David and Paul Brown about it. The three decided to honor their brother Mark Brown, who served in the Army, with a wreath for his grave in the Santa Fe Cemetery.

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In 2019, the siblings sponsored wreaths for 35 veterans' graves; however, they still wanted to do more. For 2020, Bradley's brother David and his wife, Kim, volunteered to coordinate the distribution of the wreaths at one Gallup location, and Bradley and her husband joined them to help. They found other volunteers, Stacey Randolph, Gallup City Councilor Fran Palochak (Dist. 4), and Ben Walsh, to coordinate at the other three cemeteries. Last year with the help of the community, wreaths were sponsored for 567 graves.

Bradley knew that with so many veterans buried in Gallup, this small act was important for the community.

"We have over 1,300 veterans' graves here, so around Memorial Day and Veterans' Day, families are thinking about how to honor their loved ones. It's so important to remember and honor the sacrifices that they've made," she said.

The wreaths placed on the graves are all made of balsa wood and adorned with a red bow.

On December 18, you can place the wreaths on the graves of loved ones or other veterans after a ceremony honoring them. The volunteers in Gallup coordinate with the Honor Guard in Washington, D.C., for the ceremony. Bradley explains that she has seen firsthand how much this means to families who have lost loved ones.

"In our ceremonies, we offer the families a chance to take their wreaths first before anybody goes out, and they go quietly to the grave of their loved one and place the wreath. It's very, very meaningful to these families to get to do that and participate in that ceremony," she said.

Even though last year's count of 567 is certainly impressive, the hope is to sponsor even more this year. Bradley and others would like to increase the total substantially, getting as close to placing a wreath on every veteran's grave in the city as possible.

"We need people to sponsor wreaths, not only for their loved ones, but for forgotten veterans, because there are so many, and last year there was no way we had enough wreaths. We really want more wreaths sponsored through the websites so that we can honor more of our

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veterans,” Bradley said.

Although coordination, work and money are required to honor veterans in this way, Bradley and others believe it is well worth it. Volunteers for Wreaths Across America can see when they interact with families and others participating how crucial this simple remembrance truly is.

“We see tears in families’ eyes,” Bradley says. “It’s very meaningful.”

To sponsor one of these wreaths, simply visit wreathscrossamerica.org and click “find a specific location.” From there, you can search for one of Gallup’s four cemeteries with the following codes:

New Mexico State Veterans Cemetery-Gallup: NMGSVC

Gallup City Cemetery: NMGALL

Sunset Memorial Park Cemetery: NMSSMP

Hillcrest Cemetery: NMHCGU

Wreaths cost only \$15 each. The deadline for sponsoring a wreath is Nov. 30.

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