
By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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Wreaths Across America tradition continues

Graves decorated for the annual Wreaths Across America event.

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Nearly twice as many graves were decorated with holiday wreaths than last year Dec. 17 at the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery during the annual Wreaths Across America event.

“There are 22,000 military markers at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery, and we laid 5,752 wreaths. Last year we laid 2,619 wreaths,” said Diana Pitts, location coordinator for the annual event at the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery and one of the event organizers. “This is a volunteer effort that has grown each year. We hope to eventually have enough donations to lay wreaths at all of the markers.”

The post event is part of what was originally a grassroots effort that started in Maine and has become a global patriotic enterprise consisting of more than 400 truckloads of wreaths that were transported to multiple locations around the world this year. That network is comprised of hundreds of volunteer drivers using donated trucks and fuel.

“We have seen significant growth in the number of wreaths placed at Fort Leavenworth. And, to have evolved to the point we are today of having placed wreaths at one-fourth of the markers here is wonderful. This progress has been made possible through the donations we received,” Pitts said. “The consistent growth from donor support has been truly amazing at the national level, too. For each of the last two years, 245,000 wreaths were laid at Arlington National Cemetery. That’s one wreath for each marker in that cemetery.”

Pitts, whose son, Cpl. David Unger, was killed in Iraq and is buried at Fort Leavenworth, said National Wreaths Across America Day is celebrated simultaneously at the various participating locations. The majority of the support and sustainment work is done by thousands of volunteers who conduct the local ceremonies and place wreaths at the individual markers of veterans. She said that these locations also include the national cemeteries on foreign soil, as well as ceremonies at sea. Wreaths were also placed at the Leavenworth National Cemetery.

“The purpose of this event is to remember and honor our military, and to teach our children why we have our freedoms here in America,” Pitts said. “And, the volunteers and participants always include a broad representative cross-section of people in the Fort Leavenworth community.”

Nationally, the 2016 Wreaths Across America Day effort placed 1.2 million wreaths at 1,228 cemeteries around the world. Wreaths Across America accomplished this by partnering with like-minded organizations that share common missions and goals to build greater awareness of the service and sacrifice that men and women in uniform, and their families inherently render.

Twenty-five years ago, rather than letting the 5,000 extra wreaths he had in stock go to waste, Morrill Worcester, a Maine businessman, donated them as remembrance wreaths in a gesture of his appreciation for the sacrifice of military service veterans. Those initial wreaths were placed at Arlington National Cemetery, and the effort has grown each year.

There is no cost to attend the annual ceremony or participate in Wreaths Across America at Fort Leavenworth. There are a number of ways for volunteers to get involved.

“It’s really easy to get involved,” Pitts said. “Donations are always welcome, and anyone can sponsor a wreath.”

The Wreaths Across America Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery event has a Facebook page. Planning for the event usually begins in October. For more information, contact Betty Wright at (913) 908-1575, e-mail betty7321@gmail.com, or Pitts at (913) 773-8683, e-mail pitts_diana@yahoo.com.

Wreaths Across America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. For more detailed information about this initiative, the parent organization history and to find out how to sponsor a wreath, visit www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Volunteers placed nearly 6,000 wreaths on gravesites across the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery Dec. 17 as part of Wreaths Across America. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

<http://www.ftleavenworthlamp.com/article/20161222/NEWS/161229789>

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