

# WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA STORY

*“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.*

*We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream.*

*It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same,  
or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s  
children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.”*

*—Ronald Reagan, 40<sup>th</sup> United States President (1911–2004)*



Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, was a 12-year-old paperboy 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, Morrill found himself 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 former 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.

This act of generosity became an annual tribute that went on quietly for several years each December, led by Morrill and his family 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 participate – to emulate the Arlington wreath 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 POWs/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 the annual veterans wreath ceremony in Arlington, formed Wreaths Across America (WAA), a nonprofit 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. More than 100,000 wreaths were placed on veterans’ graves. Over 60,000 volunteers participated, including members of national veterans’ organizations and the American Gold Star Mothers.

December 13, 2008, was unanimously voted by the United States Congress as National Wreaths Across America Day.

In 2011, WAA and its national network of volunteers laid 325,000 veterans' wreaths at 750 locations in the United States and beyond. WAA was able to include ceremonies at the Pearl Harbor Memorial, as well as Bunker Hill, Valley Forge and the sites of the September 11, 2001 tragedies. WAA accomplished this with help from 902 fundraising groups, corporate contributions, and donations of trucking, shipping, and thousands of helping hands.

The wreath laying is still held annually on a Saturday, each December, and has expanded to include more than 3,700 locations and 2.7 million wreaths. And for the first time in 2018, our mission expanded overseas with the placement of 9,387 veterans’ wreaths at Normandy-American Cemetery in France. Each wreath is placed by a volunteer and the names of our fallen said out loud to keep their memory alive.



# BACKGROUND & FAQ

## Who We Are

Wreaths Across America (WAA) is a national nonprofit organization founded in 2007 to continue and expand the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery begun by Maine businessman Morrill Worcester in 1992.

- ★ 1992: First wreaths (5,000) donated by Morrill Worcester and Worcester Wreath.
- ★ 2005: Iconic photo of wreaths in snow became a viral sensation.
- ★ 2007: Wreaths Across America formed as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.
  - *Organization governed by board of directors. Day-to-day operations managed by volunteer Executive Director Karen Worcester.*
- ★ 2012: Millionth wreath placed at Arlington National Cemetery.
- ★ 2014: For the first time, every headstone at Arlington National Cemetery received a wreath.
- ★ 2016: 25th year that veterans' wreaths were placed at Arlington National Cemetery.
- ★ 2018: Mission advances overseas with the first placement of 9,387 veterans' wreaths at Normandy-American Cemetery in France.
- ★ 2021: Marked the 30th year that veterans' wreaths have been placed at Arlington National Cemetery, a tradition started by Maine wreathmaker Morrill Worcester as a gift of thanks.

WAA's mission - **Remember, Honor, Teach** - is carried out in part by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington, as well as at veterans' cemeteries and other locations in all 50 states.

Every year since 2008, Congress proclaims a Saturday in December as National Wreaths Across America Day. This year, it will be held on **Saturday, Dec. 16, 2023**.

## 2022 Recap

- ★ 2.7 million veterans' wreaths were placed in total across the country.
- ★ More than two million volunteers participated at 3,700 locations nationwide. More than a third of the volunteers were children.
- ★ At Arlington National Cemetery specifically, the Wreaths Across America program saw 68 tractor trailers deliver over 257,000 veterans' wreaths that were placed by nearly 28,000 volunteers.
- ★ Over 644 truckloads of wreaths were delivered across the country by hundreds of volunteer professional truck drivers driving donated equipment and fuel from approximately 927 carriers.

## 2023 Theme: **Serve & Succeed**

The inspiration for this year's theme came while discussing the significance of 2022's theme, which was "Find a Way to Serve," and the need to continue to stress the importance of service and the positive ways it can impact lives. Wreaths Across America plans to focus on the storylines of veterans and military families who have found success through their own service, while also highlighting local volunteers across the country and the success that comes from serving their communities. The organization will continue its commitment to supporting and bringing attention to the needs of our veteran community while also showcasing the continued contributions of those who serve.

## What We Do

### REMEMBER

- ★ WAA's annual pilgrimage from Columbia Falls, Maine, to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia has become known as the world's largest veterans' 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.
- ★ The Remembrance Tree Program provides a living memorial to loved ones lost. A replica dog tag is made in honor of your loved one and it is attached to the trunk of an evergreen tree on the tip land in Maine where the brush is harvested every third year to make veterans' wreaths.
- ★ The HART Ceremony (Honoring Allies and Remembering Together) is conducted each year to honor veterans of our nation's allies in ceremonies on international border-crossing bridges between Calais, Maine and St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada; Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario, Canada; and Sweetwater, Montana and the Alaskan/Canadian border.
- ★ WAA hosts statehouse ceremonies in nearly 50 states.

### HONOR

- ★ Through WAA's national group sponsorship program, it has helped other nonprofits and civic groups such as Civil Air Patrol, Scouts, 4- H Clubs, local VFWs and American Legions raise funds for their own community needs. Since 2007, Wreaths Across America has given back more than \$20 million to local groups.
- ★ WAA conducts several programs to honor our veterans, including our popular Thanks-A-Million campaign, which distributes free "I Owe You" cards to people all over the country to share with veterans as a simple thank-you for their service and a promise to give back.
- ★ The organization participates in veterans' events throughout the year as well as public outreach through Veterans Day and Memorial Day programs, Wreaths Across America Radio, in our monthly newsletters, in press coverage and on the website.
- ★ The Wreaths Across America Museum located at the National Headquarters in Columbia Falls, Maine, showcases thousands of items that have been donated to Wreaths Across America over the decades. All donations help to provide insight and tell the greater story of the experiences of U.S. military personnel.
- ★ Wreaths Across America has a veteran liaison on staff to work with local veterans' organizations in Maine.

### TEACH

- ★ 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. In 2022, WAA relaunched its TEACH curriculum in partnership with several like-minded organizations. The new lesson plans being shared monthly are focused on character-based, service learning. You can view and download materials at [www.wreathscrossamerica.org/TEACH](http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/TEACH)
- ★ The Mobile Education Exhibit is a traveling classroom on wheels designed to inspire and educate all about the mission and those who lives have been impacted by it. The goal of the Wreaths Across America Education Exhibit is to bring local communities and our military together with education, stories, and interactive connections.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why do you use live wreaths?

Wreaths Across America does not “decorate” headstones. We are honoring all veterans and active military members by placing live, balsam veterans’ wreaths on the headstones of our nation’s servicemembers. The fresh evergreens have been used for centuries as a symbol recognizing honor and as a living tribute renewed annually. We want people to see the tradition as a living memorial to veterans and their families.

### Does WAA have a religious or political affiliation?

Wreaths Across America is not affiliated with any religion or political party. It is our mission to remember and honor every fallen military service member during the holiday season, no matter what is happening in the nation or overseas. These are not Christmas wreaths, they are veterans’ wreaths or remembrance wreaths. Our goal as an organization is to Teach younger generations about the diversity of our American heritage, and the freedoms for which so much was sacrificed.

### What are the sources of funding for WAA?

WAA receives no government funding. National Wreaths Across America Day and other events are made possible by thousands of volunteers who organize local ceremonies, raise funds to sponsor wreaths and participate in the events. Individual wreath sponsors and corporate donors, pay for most of the cost for the program and volunteer truck drivers and trucking companies make it possible for WAA to transport wreaths all over the country.

### How can I get involved?

There are several ways for volunteers to get involved. Please keep in mind that there is NO COST to attend or participate in a Wreaths Across America event.

- ★ Help place wreaths on National Wreaths Across America Day in your local community.
- ★ Sponsor a \$17 wreath for a local veteran.
- ★ Statehouse ceremony – in nearly all 50 states and at our nation’s capital.
- ★ Sign up as a sponsorship group and help place wreaths at a local or national cemetery of your choice while raising funds for your own group or program.
- ★ You can also volunteer to coordinate a new location in your state to participate in the national remembrance ceremony.



Sponsor Page:

[www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org/IN0182P](http://www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org/IN0182P)

Kikthawenund Chapter, NSDAR

Contact us: [KikthawenundDAR@gmail.com](mailto:KikthawenundDAR@gmail.com)

***National Wreaths Across America DAY***  
**DECEMBER 16, 2023**

**\*\* Grove Lawn Cemetery, Pendleton**  
**Ceremony at 9:00 a.m**

**\*\* Maplewood Cemetery, Anderson**  
**Ceremony at 12 p.m. / noon**

***WREATH PLACEMENT begins***  
***immediately after each ceremony***