



# Backgrounder

## 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 Co.
  - 2005: Iconic photo of wreaths in snow became a viral sensation
  - 2007: Wreaths Across America formed as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
    - *Organization governed by board of directors. Day-to-day operations managed by 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.
- 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.
- Since its founding, the organization has expanded to include nearly 2,000 local fundraising groups in all 50 states, representing more than 1,600 participating locations, in addition to Arlington National Cemetery.
- 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. 14, 2019.**

## 2018 Numbers

- Nearly 1.8 million veterans' wreaths were placed in total across the country – 253,000 of them at Arlington National Cemetery.
- Two millions volunteers participated at 1,640 locations nationwide, with 61,000 volunteers laying wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery. More than a third of the volunteers across the country were children.
- Approximately 600 truckloads of wreaths were delivered across the country by hundreds of volunteer professional truck drivers using donated equipment and fuel.

## 2019 Theme “Everyone Plays a Part.”

- The inspiration for this year's theme came from ten-year-old “Mighty” Miles Worcester, the grandson of the founders of Wreaths Across America. While in Washington D.C. for an event, Miles saw a U.S. Service member in uniform at the hotel where he was staying. As he always does, Miles walked up to the gentleman, reached out to shake his hand and thanked him for his service. And his response was simple and impactful: **“Thank you...everyone plays a part.”**
- He said, “those serving in the military are doing their part, but it is our part as Americans to remember and honor them, and that's what Wreaths Across America does.”

## 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 a 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**

- 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.
- Through WAA's fundraising program, it has helped other nonprofits 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 nearly \$9 million to local groups through this fundraising structure.
- The Wreaths Across America Museum located at the National Headquarters in Columbia Falls, Maine, and 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. We offer learning tools, interactive-media projects and opportunities for schools, 4-H clubs, Scouts and other youth groups to participate in our efforts.
- 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.

## **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 wreaths on the headstones of veterans. 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.

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

We receive 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 the majority 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.

## **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.

## **Why does WAA make so many stops on its way to deliver the wreaths to Arlington?**

In 2006, it was decided that instead of a quick trip to Arlington, the Patriot Guard Riders would escort the wreath trucks down the East Coast and take several days to make the trip. This would allow stops at schools, monuments, veterans’ homes and communities and give the group an opportunity to promote its mission: Remember, Honor, Teach.

## **How can I get involved?**

There are a number of 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 \$15 wreath for a local veteran.
- Statehouse ceremony – in nearly all 50 states and at our nation’s capital
- Sign up as a fundraising 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.

For more information about this year’s events, to sign up to be a volunteer or to sponsor a wreath, please visit [www.wreathscrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org). Like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/WAAHQ](https://www.facebook.com/WAAHQ), follow us on Twitter and Instagram [@WreathsAcross](https://twitter.com/WreathsAcross) and listen to [Wreaths Across America Radio](https://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/radio) 24/7.

## **Contact WAA**

Toll Free: (877) 385-9504

[info@wreathscrossamerica.org](mailto:info@wreathscrossamerica.org)