**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Wreaths Across America Announces “I’m an American. Yes, I am!” Theme for 2017**

*This year will focus on the celebration of differences, seeking to build bridges*

**MAINE and Washington, D.C. — March 1, 2017 —** Each December, Americans from all walks of life join together, in thanks on National Wreaths Across America DaytoRemember, Honor and Teach. In 2016, 1.2 million veteran wreaths were placed on headstones at more than 1,230 cemeteries around the country in honor of the service and sacrifices made for our freedoms, with each name said aloud. Today, the nonprofit announced that the national theme for 2017 is, ***I’m an American***. ***Yes, I am!***

The inspiration for the 2017 theme is a song by Maine’s own singer/songwriter Rick Charette. But it was when the words were sung by a group of enthusiastic school children at Kennebunk Elementary School during a stop on the escort of wreaths to Arlington last December that it took on new meaning for the organization.

“Though it was a snow day for the school, many children still came in to greet us and perform for the escort,” said Karen Worcester, executive director, Wreaths Across America. “As part of their performance, the children sang ‘I’m an American…YES, I am!’ and every single person standing in that auditorium couldn’t help but sing along, cheering and watching in awe as these children beamed with pride. That is what being an American is all about.”

The song, which entwines patriotism and acceptance of differences together, became a favorite of the 2016 Wreaths Across America escort, which included many American Gold Star Mothers, Blue Star families, veterans and volunteers. The group was touched and inspired by the spirited performance. After their visit, the escort participants found themselves singing the words often throughout their weeklong trip down the east coast to Arlington National Cemetery.

Rick Charette wrote “I’m an American” in 2002 to help kids appreciate the sacrifices women and men have made in protecting the American freedoms that we all enjoy. The inspiration for the song came from his own personal feelings on what it means to be American. A former teacher turned singer/songwriter; Charette has been writing and performing for children for the last 30 years.

“When we come together to place wreaths, there are people from the left and the right, it doesn't matter your faith or your politics. We are there as Americans,” added Worcester. “Our mission welcomes anyone to join us in remembering those who gave their lives for our freedom, including our freedom to be different from one another. And now, more than ever, we want to help people find common ground with one another by supporting our military and their families, Remembering the fallen, Honoring those who serve and Teaching the next generation the true meaning of freedom.”

*“I’m an American” by Rick Charette*

*I’m an American. Yes I am.  
I love my country. I love my land.  
With you and me together, we each play a part.  
We can make a difference with love in our hearts.   
  
We are many. We are one.  
We are shining in the sun.  
We’re united standing tall.  
With liberty and justice for all.  
I’m an American. Yes I am.  
I hold the world’s future here in my hands.  
Gonna sing and shout it! It’s great to be free.   
Every single person has dignity.*

*I’m an American. Yes I am.  
I promise that I will do what I can.  
I’ll stand up for freedom. Live my life without fear  
Going to make a better world, I know we’ll persevere*.

National Wreaths Across America Day is a free event and open to ALL people. For more information, visit [www.wreathsacrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathsacrossamerica.org).

**About Wreaths Across America**

Wreaths Across America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded to continue and expand the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery begun by Maine businessman Morrill Worcester in 1992. The organization’s mission – Remember, Honor, Teach – is carried out in part each year by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies in December at Arlington, as well as at hundreds of veterans’ cemeteries and other locations in all 50 states and beyond. For more information or to sponsor a wreath please visit [www.wreathsacrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathsacrossamerica.org).

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