



## BACKGROUND & FAQ 2024

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. \*
- 2012: Millionth wreath placed at Arlington National Cemetery.
- 2014: For the first time, every eligible marker at Arlington National Cemetery received a veteran's wreath.
- 2016: 25th year that veterans' wreaths are placed by volunteers at Arlington National Cemetery.
- 2018: Mission advances overseas with the placement of 9,387 veterans' wreaths at Normandy-American Cemetery in France.
- 2021: Marked the 30<sup>th</sup> year that veterans' wreaths have been placed at Arlington National Cemetery.
- 2023: Expanded to include more than 4,200 participating locations, every state and U.S. territory participates in National Wreaths Across America Day.

WAA's yearlong mission is to **Remember** the fallen, **Honor** those who serve, and **Teach** the next generation the value of freedom.

Since 2008, Congress proclaims a Saturday in December as National Wreaths Across America Day. This year, it will be held on **Saturday, Dec. 14, 2024**.

*\*Organization governed by board of directors. Day-to-day operations managed by volunteer Executive Director Karen Worcester.*

### 2023 RECAP

- Three million sponsored veterans' wreaths were placed in total across the country.
- More than three million volunteers participated at 4,224 locations nationwide. More than a third of the volunteers were children.
- At Arlington National Cemetery specifically, 68 tractor trailers delivered over 259,000 veterans' wreaths that were placed by more than 30,000 volunteers.



- 675 loads of wreaths were delivered across the country by over 332 trucking companies.

## 2024 Theme: Live with purpose

Live with Purpose draws inspiration from the remarkable stories of these volunteers whose impactful work in their communities is a beacon of inspiration for all. “Over the course of the last year, and then especially on the escort to Arlington last December, I listened to people who had gone through great adversity, and they'd taken that adversity and turned it around as a call to action to spend the rest of their lives making sure that every day was meaningful and that they lived with purpose,” said executive director Karen Worcester. “For me, living with purpose is a mindset.”

## Our Mission

### **REMEMBER the fallen.**

- 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 those who serve.**

- 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 \$22 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.

### **TEACH the next generation the value of freedom.**

- 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 lesson plans that are centered around character-based, service learning for grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>. Download these plans for free on our website.
- The Mobile Education Exhibit (MEE) is a traveling classroom on wheels designed to inspire and educate about the mission and those whose lives have been impacted by it. The goal of the exhibit is to bring local communities and our military together with education, stories, and interactive connections. To request the MEE come to your area, visit our website.
- In 2022, WAA hosted the grand opening of the Gold Star Family History & Hospitality House. The historic home is located next door to the nonprofit’s national headquarters and National Museum in Maine. Each room has been decorated to represent a period in U.S. history associated with a military conflict. Stepping back in time in this beautiful home, while experiencing the lifestyle of the era and further learning personal stories of those who served in that time will be a history lesson to remember.



## 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 is 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 transportation 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 WAA event. Learn more at [www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathsasscrossamerica.org).

- Help place wreaths on National Wreaths Across America Day in your local community.
- Sponsor a \$17 wreath for a local veteran.
- 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.