

Wreaths Across America

2015 marked the 24th anniversary of Worcester Wreath Company donating Maine wreaths to adorn the headstones of our Nation's veterans at Arlington National Cemetery. In addition to wreaths destined for Virginia, Worcester Wreath will again donate seven ceremonial wreaths to over 1000 State, National, Foreign, and local cemeteries across the country. In 2009, wreath-laying ceremonies were coordinated in 24 foreign cemeteries and this tradition continues into 2015.

In response to the many voices who wanted to share in the project, the non-profit Wreaths Across America organization was formed to expand the program by offering supporters the opportunity to sponsor a wreath. The organization's goal is to one day see every veteran's grave in the country covered to honor every veteran during the holidays. In 2008, it expanded once again to give even more organizations the chance to help bring the goal to fruition by providing the opportunity to fund raise for their organizations' needs, along with helping Wreaths Across America gather sponsorships for wreaths.

Due to the generosity of the families and community, Wreaths Across America collected enough donations to purchase wreaths for all of those interred at the KCVAO Cemeteries. We thank each of you who helped to make this possible. Following the ceremonies, each family placed a wreath on their loved one's grave. The American Legion Riders placed wreaths on graves in which the family was unable to attend.

Fort Dodge :

Approximately 175 people attended the annual Wreaths Across America service on Saturday, December 12th at the Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Dodge. Due to the generosity of the community, not only did every grave in the New Cemetery receive a wreath, but over 700 veterans in the Old Kansas Soldier's Home Cemetery had a wreath placed on their graves. Rev. Dick Robbins began the ceremony with the invocation. Sergeant Steve McBryde, United States Army National Guard Funeral Honors Team, was the Master of Ceremonies for this event. Calder McCollum from Wright Wonder Workers 4-H Club led everyone to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Linda Klaus, Gold Star Mothers, beautifully sang the National Anthem. SGT Andres Berge, AWF1 David Jackson, SGT Rafael Herrera, SRA Joshua Vander-Heyden, AIC Sergio Marioni, and SGT Robert Boles placed the wreaths during the ceremony. The Howard Gotschall VFW Post 1714 provided the honors, with Raymond Stroud playing Taps. The families, American Legion Riders, VFW, 4-H Clubs, and other volunteers placed the wreaths upon the graves following the ceremony. A reception was held following the ceremony in the Administrative Office. Food

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Wreaths Across America-Continued

Winfield:

Winfield had unseasonably pleasant weather which was enjoyed by all who attended the annual Wreaths Across America ceremony at the Winfield Veterans Cemetery. There were well over 300 hundred people in attendance.

Chaplain Randy Colby was the Master of Ceremonies and started out with a moment of silence for those who have served and those who are serving this great nation. The Civil Air Patrol Emerald City Composite Squadron and Tornado Alley Young Marines posted the colors as McKenzie Wheeler beautifully sang the Star Spangled Banner.

Brief but poignant speeches were given by Mary Kay Adkinson, a Gold Star Sister, and Jennifer Yount of the Survivor Support Service in Wichita. They were followed by the Key Note Speaker, Mr. Joseph Collins of the Department of Veterans' Affairs Office in Wichita.

Following the Key Note speaker, wreaths were laid for each branch of service and the local American Legion and VFW provided a rifle volley.



Wreaths Across America-Continued

WaKeeney :

Volunteers and families gathered in the Administrative Building for coffee and donuts before the annual Wreaths Across America ceremony at the Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at WaKeeney. Approximately 225 people participated in the annual event. Rev. Delbert Stanton began the ceremony with an invocation, immediately following 38 members of the American Legion Riders who performed the procession of flags. Lieutenant Colonel Errol Wuertz, Kansas Wing, Civil Air Patrol, was the Master of Ceremonies. CPT Kenneth Brennan, SSGT Robert Munsch, LCDR Mike Morley, MSSGT Denise Thraikill, RM2 Jim Oss, FC2 Wesley Alsdurf, and SGT Leroy Herrman placed the special wreaths during the ceremony. The Hays VFW Post 9076 provided the honors. Immediately following the ceremony, families, the American Legion Riders, the Knights of Columbus, and other volunteers placed wreaths on all of the graves.



Wreaths Across America-Continued

Fort Riley:

This year's Wreaths Across America at the Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Riley was the best-attended in the program's seven year history. Nearly 500 people attended the ceremony, which took place on a crisp, clear December morning of December 12, 2015. Thanks to the efforts of the Junction City High School JROTC volunteers, the cemetery had enough wreaths to cover every site. Earlier that morning, volunteers from the Daughters of the American Revolution, and from the American Legion Riders Post 17, came to assist with preparation of the wreaths and directing parking.

At 11:00 a.m., with the families gathered in and around the committal shelter, Cecelia Shellnut, the Project Officer for the ceremony, began the proceeding with a warm welcome. Some of the JROTC cadets served as the Honor Guard and were dressed in colonial uniforms. CSM (Ret) John C. White Jr. placed our POW/MIA wreath, and other cadets assisted with the placing the ceremonial wreaths and playing of Taps. Firing honors were provided by the Kansas National Guard, and Jaeden Cooper, a sophomore at Junction City High school, sang the national anthem.

After the ceremony, the families moved to the grave sites of their loved ones and tenderly placed the wreaths. They were followed by numerous volunteers who place wreaths at the other sites, insuring that each site was covered. After placing the wreaths, many family members and volunteers gathered in the cemetery Honor Guard Room and enjoyed a hospitality suite of hot drinks and goodies. The families were very appreciative of the effort spent to honor and remember their loved ones.



The Honor of Serving Those Who Served

Deputy Director Bollig, W. (2015). The Honor of Serving Those Who Served.

Most state of Kansas Veteran Service Representatives have not seen a pay increase for years. I can't really brag about the salary we pay them, given the knowledge we require them to have, the travel we require of them, and the hours they often have to keep. Having said that one might ask, why would anyone want this job, let alone to stay through all of this?

As an accredited Veteran Service Representative myself, one of the most rewarding parts of this job is, no, let me rephrase that, **the most rewarding part of the job** is visiting with veterans and hearing their stories. These stories are delivered by veterans with humility and are often told only as background so we can truly help the veteran in filing for earned benefits. In my experience, these stories are not told for the accolades. They are stories that should be shared because they are stories of true Kansas heroes. The stories they tell and our ability to help them is the reason we are Veteran Service Representatives. It is my hope that other Veteran Service Representatives will, when they meet a veteran with a story that they feel should be shared, seek permission from the veteran, then take a moment to share the details of that veteran's story with the rest of us in this section of the KCVAO newsletter.



One such story was shared by Ryon Knop our Independence Kansas, Veteran Service Representative; the story is about Homer Cole. Homer was 18 when he was drafted and inducted into the Army Air Corps, where he served honorably until his discharge in November of 1945. Mr. Cole flew 19 missions while serving in England during WWII. On April 10, 1945, his plane was almost shot down over Brandenburg, Germany.

Mr. Cole indicated that, "Flak went through my helmet and just nicked my skull"; the plane he was in was carrying 20 bombs and hit repeatedly, "we counted 124 holes in that plane." The plane managed to limp to safety. While flying only 300 feet off the ground the plane made it back and made an emergency landing in Brussels, Belgium. Mr. Cole related the story to Ryon, that the radio operator had been killed by the flak. In addition, the co-pilot's leg had been blown off and the pilot had been so severely injured that Mr. Cole had to help fly the wounded plane back. As Mr. Cole related the story, we get the full picture of what this veteran and most of the veterans we serve are truly made of.

In addition to the physical damage to his friends, Mr. Cole tells how two of the plane's engines were out. Due to the damage, they were not going to be able to slow the plane during landing. The pilot had Mr. Cole open the tail door and attach parachutes to the door. When touching down, the pilot ordered Mr. Cole to pop open the chutes. This was just enough to slow the plane down, even while ripping the chutes to shreds. Mr. Cole indicated they used the shreds as scarfs.

Mr. Cole was honorably discharged in November of 1945, and while he received a Purple Heart for his service, he quietly returned home to Pittsburg, KS. Mr. Cole was one of the many veterans that took advantage of the GI Bill. He used it to attend Pittsburg State University where he played basketball. He proudly said he set a record of career games played of 110, a mark that stood for nearly 50 years.

Like most veterans of this era we deal with, Mr. Cole worked hard all his life, and now at the age of 90 has finally come forward to receive the benefits he earned 70 years ago when he received his Purple Heart.

Like Ryon, I feel it is the, "Things like this that makes this a very enjoyable job." If you think about it, what other job is there where, as a State of Kansas employee, you are privileged to provide service and support to our humblest of heroes, the quiet hometown veteran?

Thank you Mr. Cole for your service to your country, your service to Kansas and your service to your community.

And thank you Ryon for your service to Mr. Cole and all the veterans you support every day.

Kansas Soldiers Home



On October 18th, KSH had a hog roast for residents and staff. The Resident Benefit Fund purchased a 145 pound, dressed hog. The maintenance staff constructed a pit, and on October 17th, KSH started the fire! After about 6 hours, they had a sufficient bed of coals. Residents and staff prepared the hog and it went in the pit at about 4:30 PM. On the 18th, the hog was unearthed. The Hog Roast happened to coincide with a donation presentation by AMVETS, along with a group of motorcycle riders out of Wichita. The donation was just over two-thousand dollars. KSH served approximately 150 plates of food to their residents, staff and guests. KSH Superintendent David Smith stated, "This has been a tremendous success, and we hope to have a hog roast at least twice a year from here on out."



The business office area has had a few improvements. New carpet was installed in the office area and new furniture was purchased for the staff at the Kansas Soldiers Home. A new large Flat Screen TV was installed in the lobby area, along with some new furniture. KSH is creating its own "in house" channel through Cox communications that will broadcast meal menus, photos of past events, postings of scheduled activities, photos of new hires, job postings, etc.. The new channel will also be available to all residents in all campus areas.



Kansas Soldiers Home - Continued

The Kansas Soldiers' Home Residents are enjoying some fantastic donations. A 70" TV was donated to the Activities section for the residents. They have also had a set of 3 new recliners and 2 motorized wheelchairs donated. Donations came from Vets for Veterans (Deerfield, KS), and the VVA in Hays.



Boot Hill Casino and Resort has again created their "Hero Tree" for the KSH residents. Each year they get the names of all of the KSH veterans, along with their Christmas wish lists. Their employees then draw names from the tree and purchase the gifts requested. Last year every wish list item was obtained. Residents also participated in the Great Bend and Hays Gift Shop. The resources provided gifts for residents and family members. The great thing about this is that residents were given the opportunity to choose gifts for family members, giving them the full shopping and gift giving experience.



Kansas Veterans' Home

New Faces of KVH

The Kansas Veterans' Home is happy to introduce new faces to our Administration team.

Kafer Peele joins the program as Superintendent after years as the Director of the KCVAO State Cemetery Program. During his watch, that program expanded to include new areas in the Kansas Veterans Cemetery at Ft. Dodge and new cemeteries at WaKeeney, Ft. Riley and Winfield. During his tenure at KCVAO, Kafer also served as the Administrative Officer for the agency and the Agency IT Director. He has an undergraduate degree from Emporia State University and completed his MBA at Baker University. Mr. Peele is an Army veteran with seven years in field artillery.

Dan Laffery is new to KCVAO, bringing to the Clinical Director's position extensive experience from work at other nursing homes. Mr. Laffery became a nursing home administrator after years in nursing that started with service as a Medic in the Army. He finished his BSN at Ft. Hays State University and completed his administrator training through KACE.

Please help us welcome these new members of the KVH Administrative team.



Superintendent, Kafer Peele and Clinical Director, Dan Laffery

Kansas Veterans' Home-Continued

2015 KVH Holiday Celebrations

The Kansas Veterans' Home enjoyed a month of celebrations including the American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shop, a Christmas Cantata presentation, a performance of Eagerheart from Southwestern College theater students, a visit from Fort Riley's Army Band, trips to Winfield's Isle of Lights, and two parties that included visits from Santa.

The 16th Annual American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shop at KVH was a success, with many residents "shopping" for their families. The Auxiliary collects shop items and runs the shop, residents pick gifts for loved ones and the Auxiliary wraps and ships the presents – all at no cost to the resident or the facility. This very generous undertaking involves Legion posts from throughout the state and dozens of volunteers assisting with set up, assisting shoppers, wrapping presents, preparing packages for shipping and transporting the packages to the post office. Thanks to everyone for their work and to Santa's special helper, Dorothy Malone, for coordinating efforts to provide this gift to residents and their families. Arkansas City's Trinity Baptist Choir returned with their amazing Christmas Cantata performance on December 5. We look forward to their visit this spring with the Easter Cantata.

Southwestern College's Roger Moon and his theater students brought a performance of Eagerheart to the Kansas Veterans' Home allowing residents to enjoy this holiday play. Residents filled the hall for a visit from the Army Band from Fort Riley on December 12 before the troops participated in the Light Parade in downtown Winfield. KVH residents watched the parade and on other evenings throughout the month, they loaded up to see the Isle of Lights at Winfield's Island Park. Each year the community turns the park into an illuminated series of displays that are always fun to see.



Kansas State Veterans' Cemeteries



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Dodge



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Fort Riley



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at WaKeeney



Kansas Veterans' Cemetery at Winfield

Pre-registration form [KCVA 200](#)

VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program

VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program

Changes Remove Barriers and Expand Access to Care

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced a number of changes to make participation in the [Veterans Choice Program](#) easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

“As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve.” To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014.

Under the old policy, a Veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:

- Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat Veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program;
- Experienced unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the Veteran’s ability to travel; Determined eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran’s physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician;
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
- Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment.

For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

KCVAO Mobile Services

The KCVAO Mobile Offices are Ready to Assist!

The Kansas Enhanced Veteran Services Program is a proven outreach program that makes applying for federal and state benefits easier for veterans and eligible family members. The staff at Hays and Emporia have partnered with many organizations and businesses in the last four years to assist veterans all over the state. We have provided top-notch veteran advocacy at fairs, parades, sporting events, and other locations throughout the State of Kansas.



The Emporia Mobile Office at the Sprint Campus in Overland Park



Veterans Day Parade in Leavenworth

If you have questions, or if you would like to schedule one of our vans for your event, please call the Program Supervisor, Eric Rohleder, (785) 260-3100 or email westksvsp@media-net.net. You can also download the form at the link below and email, fax, or mail it to the address or number listed on the form.

Events are scheduled on a priority first-come, first-serve basis with the many dates scheduled at least 45-60 days in advance. However, the KCVAO will make every effort to participate in your event if the date is available.

[Mobile Services Office Request Form](#)

[Mobile Office Schedule](#)

The Mobile Delivery Program Mobile Office Schedule

EVENT	DATES		HOURS		LOCATION	CITY
	FROM	TO	FROM	TO		
VA Claims Clinic (H)	Dec 1	Dec 1	1 pm	5 pm	KCVAO	Hays
VA Claims Clinic (H)	Dec 2	Dec 2	8:30 am	12:30 pm	KCVAO	Hays
Mobile Visit (H)	Jan 20	Jan 20	9 am	4:30 pm	Dollar General	Plainville
Mobile Visit (H)	Jan 21	Jan 21	9 am	4:30 pm	Dollar General	Russell
Mobile Visit (H)	Jan 26	Jan 26	9 am	4 pm	Dollar General	Phillipsburg
Mobile Visit (E)	Jan 26	Jan 26	9 am	6 pm	Caseys	Madison
Mobile Visit (E)	Jan 27	Jan 27	9 am	6 pm	Intersection Hwys 54 & 75	Yates Center
Mobile Visit (E)	Jan 28	Jan 28	9 am	6 pm	Courthouse	Ottawa
Mobile Outreach (H)	Mar 5	Mar 5	12 pm	3 pm	American Legion	Belleville
McConnell Job Fair (E)	Mar 30	Mar 30	8 am	5 pm	Ballroom	McConnell AFB
Leavenworth Job Fair (E)	Apr 5	Apr 5	8 am	5 pm	Staff College	Fort Leavenworth
Farm & Ranch Expo (H)	Apr 6	Apr 8	8 am	5 pm	Expo Grounds	Great Bend
Ft Riley Job Fair (E)	Apr 20	Apr 20	8 am	5 pm	Conference Center	Fort Riley

**For information on VA Education Benefits
click on the links below**

[VA Education Benefits](#)

[How To Use Your Education Benefits Brochure](#)

**For information on the State Approving Agency Process
click the link below**



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