

November 2009, Number 6

Compatriots, as this year comes to a close, we should reflect on what a busy year it has been. There are many signs around the world of turmoil and confusion, yet our Society is functioning and doing well. We have a dedicated membership that attend meetings, involve the Society in good works in the community and good officers that represent the Society.

Being that this is the time of year when one begins to reflect back over what has occurred in the past several months and when one is looking forward to what next year brings, let me share with you a story that touches everyone.

This is the story of one person that made a difference—Janet Ragno. The story that follows is really her story, but she will not tell you that. She is the person that put it together and some of us, that heard her speak at the Varnum Armory, will join her on December 8<sup>th</sup>. All are invited.

### **Ponaganset Middle School Honors Veterans**

Ponaganset Middle School is working with Wreaths Across America, an organization that honors America's Veterans. Wreaths Across America, a non profit organization, was formed as an extension of the Arlington Wreath Project. The Arlington Wreath Project was started by Morrill Worcester of the Worcester Wreath Company, located in Harrington, Maine, in 1992 with the donation and laying of 5000 Christmas wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery. This became an annual journey for Mr. Worcester.

It was a relatively obscure program until 2005 when a photo of the stones adorned with wreaths and covered in snow circulated around the internet. The project received National attention. The thousands of requests that poured in from all over the country from people wanting to emulate the Arlington project at their National and State cemeteries spurred the creation of "Wreaths Across America", the mission: Remember, Honor and Teach. Unable to donate thousands of wreaths to each state, Mr. Worcester conceived the idea of sending 7 wreaths (one for each branch of the military as well as POW/MIA). In 2006 over 150 locations held wreath laying ceremonies simultaneously.

The Patriot Guard Riders, a group of veterans who ride escort on motorcycles, volunteered as escort for the wreaths going to Arlington. This began the annual "Veterans Honor Parade" that travels the east coast in early December.

By 2008 over 300 locations held wreath laying ceremonies in every state, Puerto Rico and 24 overseas cemeteries. Over 100,000 wreaths were placed on veterans graves. Over 60,000 volunteers participated. In 2008 Ponaganset Middle School asked to be included as a wreath laying site in order to culminate a unit on teaching respect and appreciation for the service of all American military veterans. Students researched the veteran experience and ceremonies were held at military memorials in both Foster and Glocester where veterans were invited to be honored and the wreaths donated by the Worcester Wreath Company were placed. Foster and Glocester Police Departments served as Honor Guards.

This year, Wreaths Across America, despite several invitations within the state to stop and be honored in Rhode Island on the convoy's way to Arlington, instead contacted Ponaganset Middle School and asked that the school be their ceremony site, citing the school's commitment to this program. On December 8, 2009, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. the Wreaths Across America convoy, consisting of 4 trailer trucks full of wreaths destined for Arlington National Cemetery, the Worcester family and supporters, Maine State Police escort, Rhode Island State Police escort, and the Warwick Police motorcycle unit, escorted by the Patriot Guard Riders will be led to the school by our own Glocester and Foster Police where they will participate in a ceremony to honor our Veterans. After the ceremony the convoy will continue on their journey to Arlington National Cemetery where volunteers will lay over 15,000 wreaths on December 12.

Additionally last year, Ponaganset Middle School students showed their support for this program and all our Veterans by leaving personal messages at Veterans' memorials on the eighth grade trip to Washington, D.C., emphasizing the message "Remember, Honor, Teach". We invite Veterans to Ponaganset Middle School to participate in this important ceremony on December 8, 2009. Please contact Janet Ragno at [jragno@fg.k12.ri.us](mailto:jragno@fg.k12.ri.us) or 710-7500 ext. 2241 for more information and to register as veterans to be recognized at the ceremony.

Also, Wreaths Across America is accepting sponsorships for wreaths to be placed on veterans' graves. If you would like to sponsor a wreath to honor a veteran, you may go to [wreaths-across-America.org](http://wreaths-across-America.org) or use the link on the middle school website located at [www.fg.k12.ri.us](http://www.fg.k12.ri.us).

**Happy Holidays!**

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