

Fallen soldiers honored at U.S. National Cemetery in Alton with moving sunset ceremony

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
May 31 2016 12:12 PM





ALTON - Fallen soldiers buried in the **United States National Cemetery in Alton** were honored Monday evening with a sunset ceremony.

The event was the 11th annual organized by Vietnam veteran and **Alton Middle School co-teacher, Richard Baird**. Baird said he started organizing them after he and a group of students cleaned the cemetery in 2005. It features several prayers and comments by local veterans and dignitaries.

"I did this with the purpose to help our young folks appreciate the legacy of freedom," Baird said. "National honor should be given to those folks who laid down their lives."

Rich Dansizen was guiding young folks to appreciate and honor the fallen with the Alton High School Air Force ROTC color guard and saber team. Dansizen has served in the United States Air Force for 23 years, and has taught ROTC for 20 years. He said Memorial Day Weekend was a very busy day for his students.

"We do a lot stuff in the community," he said. "We lay Christmas wreaths in December, and put the flowers and flags on the graves on Saturday. It's a long weekend, but it's good stuff. It's a great learning experience for them."



The ceremony took place in front of a backdrop of a massive American flag recently purchased by the Alton Fire Department. The fire department also contributed the talents of **Capt. David Whiteside**. Whiteside brings the bagpipes and plays them at ceremonial events. **Alton Fire Chief Bernie Sebold** said they are the only department in the area with a bagpiper.

"He's really a fantastic addition to our department," Sebold said. "No other department in the area has a bagpipe. I came down today to pay tribute to the veterans who have given their lives for our country."

The ceremony was the first for musical duo **Jack and Myra Hughey**, who performed several musical selections for the event.

Vietnam veteran Dannie Holliday was the guest speaker, and the benediction was performed by **Chaplin Marc Lane**.

The Alton High School Air Force ROTC presented and retired colors and performed the "Table Top Ceremony" for P.O.W.s and soldiers who are M.I.A.



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)