

# National Guard Soldiers serve thousands of families in moments of grief

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SPRINGFIELD – Whenever a Soldier dies, Military Funeral Honors have traditionally been provided, and today that tradition is law if the family requests it. Providing those honors is a solemn duty undertaken by the men and women of the Illinois Army National Guard Funeral Honors Program. These Soldiers serve the families of any deceased member of the Army in the state of Illinois. As part of the Illinois National Guard, the Soldiers of Funeral Honors provide support to military families in times of grief.

During 2017 the Honors Teams supported more than 4,500 ceremonies for Soldiers of the United States Army, the Army Reserve, and the Illinois Army National Guard. That number is a 32 percent increase from the approximately 3,100 ceremonies that Funeral Honors supported in 2016.



Funeral Honors is led by Command Sgt. Maj. Lester Edwards of Mechanicsburg and has 14 full-time staff, as well as Honors Teams out of Chicago, Decatur, Macomb, and Marion, Illinois. Ceremonies take place at any place you can imagine a family may want to remember their Soldier.

"We provide support any place that the family requests the service to be conducted. We have conducted support in military cemeteries, civilian cemeteries, civilian residences, restaurants," said Edwards.





Requests for support come from the families themselves, funeral homes, and the Casualty Assistance Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The ceremonies are conducted at no cost to the families. Families that did not receive honors at time of burial can request an Honors Team to perform a ceremony at a later date for the family as well.

In 2018 Funeral Honors will continue to support as many requests as possible recognizing that the veteran population from World War II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars are aging. Illinois Military Funeral Honors continues to support the families of Illinois Soldiers in their times of need and fulfills the Army's mission to honor the service of all Soldiers from Illinois.