

# **Alton National Cemetery Sunset Ceremony again moves those in attendance**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - The 13th Annual Sunset Service at Alton National Cemetery was again a beautiful way to conclude Memorial Day weekend for those in attendance.

Hosted from the beginning by Richard Baird, the ceremony is one of the more patriotic and meaningful events of its magnitude year after year in the Riverbend. Baird, the voice of the Alton Redbirds at home athletic events, is the driver of the tribute, which is always filled with emotion.

Marquette Catholic High School graduate Kathleen Botterbush was the guest speaker and focused her speech on the Veteran's Heritage Project. Alton Mayor Brant Walker continued his presence at the nighttime Memorial Day event and spoke. Legendary vocalist Phyllis Banks again as Baird called it "stole the show" at the event and Dan Whiteside started and finished the event with "Scotland The Brave" and "Amazing Grace" with the Alton Pipes & Drum.

Other highlights of the program were an inspiring speech by Konrad Tolai, a National Cemetery Administration Director intern, presentation of colors by the Alton High School R.O.T.C., the National Anthem by Alton Middle School students Josie Giertz, Sophia Kumagai, Hallie Lewis, Alexia Paulin and E'Niya Fields.

Alton Police Chaplain Marc Lane gave the invocation. Host Baird was presented with an emotional Quilt of Honor in a ceremony and he also delivered his normal comments. Baird is a Vietnam veteran.

"Peacefully we are graced to sit here and stand at Alton's National Cemetery shrine. We gather in reverence at this National Cemetery," Baird told the crowd. "The identity of this land transformed in 1940 when the United States federal government designated it as a special place. Its value at least to me is immeasurable. As citizens of Alton recognized years ago, collectively, we extend our gratitude."

Walker's words seemed to reverberate during the Sunset Ceremony about the purpose of the occasion.

"Memorial Day is not just a day of honoring veterans, but a day we honor veterans who lost their lives serving their country and paid the ultimate price. Across our nation, citizens and veterans gather today to pay homage to those who gave their lives for our freedom."























