

Father's appearance adds meaning to Wreaths Across America day

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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George Reutter, the father of Margaret Hopkins, who plans and organizes the Wreaths Across America program in Alton each year, stands next to fellow WWII participant

Robert Ryan. Both men and three other WWII veterans were honored at the Wreaths ceremony.

The annual Wreaths Across America day had special meaning this year when Margaret Hopkins' father, George Reutter, 89, and a World War II veteran from Kansas City, Mo., attended.

The wreaths ceremony is every year on a selected Saturday in December at the same hour at the Alton National Cemetery and at nearly 1,000 other locations across this country.

Hopkins' father joined four other World War II veterans who were recognized together at the ceremony to a full applause.

"This year during the service we acknowledged the WWII veterans that participated and it was very touching," Hopkins said. "When I started to introduce them I was okay until I got to my father, and then I became very emotional and had a hard time finishing. I was honored and grateful that he was able to be there."

Hopkins admitted her father was a man of few words, but he expressed gratitude to her and being present. He said he wanted to come back next year when he turns 90 for the ceremony.

The weather was perfect, sunny and about 50 degrees on Saturday and the crowd was larger than normal.

"I think there were 22 boys from St. Peter and Paul Scouts Troop 16 and 10-12 leaders who set the cemetery up with the wreaths and got everything ready," Hopkins said. "The wreaths arrived on Thursday morning and a small group of us unloaded the semi truck. I started working on this in July and August making preliminary phone calls and getting all hands on deck. The last couple days went really well."

Fourth-grade students at St. Mary's Catholic School assisted the veterans in their row assignments and the third-grade chorus sang the National Anthem. The Alton High School ROTC Color Guard also participated this year, as did the regulars from the Illinois Patriot Guard. Argosy Casino provided the hospitality area at the gathering.

The Alton Convention & Visitor's Bureau provided a shuttle so people could park and ride to the location.

Throughout the country at 1,000 locations, communities participated in the Wreaths Day ceremony starting with Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

“In 2014 Arlington National Cemetery celebrated its 150th anniversary and Wreaths Across America was in hopes of decorating all the graves (there are hundreds of thousands) and a few days before the event they were only 20,000 wreaths short of completing this goal,” he said. “Here at the Alton National Cemetery we have about 560 graves.”

Hopkins said it just an honor to participate in the wreaths ceremony each year.

“We are so honored to have a National Cemetery here in Alton,” he said. “On the website for Wreaths Across America they use a quote, ‘In life these soldiers honored their country and in death we honor them.’ I am so very proud that we were able to once again, Remember, Honor and Teach by the simple gesture of laying wreaths at this memorial site.”

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