

# **"Hero Down, Flags Up": Org Asks for Volunteers to Honor Local Soldier**

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ST. LOUIS - A St. Louis family is grieving the loss of U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Eric Rucker in a hit-and-run accident near Fort Cavazos, where Rucker was stationed in Texas. A local organization is asking for volunteers so that they don't have to grieve alone.

The Flagman's Mission Continues is a nonprofit that travels throughout the Midwest, putting up American flags for fallen soldiers and first responders. The organization will be lining the funeral route for Rucker with flags this weekend. They're asking anyone who wants to volunteer to join them on June 24 and 26 to put up and take down the flags.

"We basically organize a community and give a community a way to pay honor to a fallen hero they may or may not have known that's coming home to their hometown...by lining all or part of the funeral route with these big 3 by 5-foot flags on 10-foot poles," Jeff Hastings, the head of The Flagman's Mission Continues, said. "And that's what we're going to do in Richmond Heights and Maplewood this weekend."



A St. Louis native, Rucker was killed by a motorist in the early hours of June 11. Rucker was riding on a motorcycle with his friends when he stopped to retrieve a friend's hat; a gray sedan struck him and fled the scene. He was 29 years old. His pregnant wife and three children moved back to the St. Louis area a few months ago.

Hastings explained that the number of flags will ultimately depend on the number of volunteers, but they have up to 600 flags ready for the memorial. The Flagman's

Mission Continues asks volunteers to meet in the rear parking lot at 11 a.m. on June 24 at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church of Maplewood to put up the flags, and again at 4 p.m. on June 26 after the funeral service to take down the flags. No sign-up or commitment is necessary.

“It’s a community project,” Hastings said. “All we’re doing is providing the equipment and instructions and tools as a free service to pay honor for the family and give the community a way to pay honor.”

Hastings explained that the organization started in the early 2000s when a man named Larry Eckhardt attended a U.S. Marine’s funeral and was disappointed to see there weren’t many people or honors. This inspired him to buy 50 flags and put them up himself.

Eckhardt began working with other volunteers to honor fallen service members and first responders throughout the region. He estimated that he attended about 200 funerals throughout his life. Hastings, who took over after Eckhardt’s death in 2020, said that the organization participated in 45 funerals in 2022 alone. Today, they own over 2,000 flags.

Hastings said that the volunteer work allows community members to connect and get to know each other. He noted that the flags and this display of support often mean a great deal to mourning families.

“The family is grieving so badly and they’re so numb to everything that’s going on, they don’t really remember. It’s just human nature,” Hastings said. “But the one thing I find that they remember...they remember that their community, people who didn’t even know their loved one, came together and lined the funeral route with flags. They always remember that.”

Hastings said that volunteers should wear comfortable shoes and bring gloves. They ask for volunteers over age 11. For more information about The Flagman’s Mission Continues, visit [their website](#).

“It is so honorable and humbling for us to connect with these people and give them a good memory of when their loved one was brought home,” Hastings said. “We’re helping families heal.”

Contact Hastings at 618-409-0323 if you have any questions about how to get involved with this weekend’s memorial for Rucker.