

Wreaths Across America Returns to MHS

by John Esposito; photos by Ken Kraetzer



Kemper Memorial Park

(December 18, 2008) Despite the rain on Thursday, December 11, there was a large crowd on hand to welcome the "Wreaths Across America" convoy when it arrived at Mamaroneck High School at 11:00 am. For the second consecutive year, "Wreaths Across America" designated Kemper Memorial Park as one of the stops it would make during its journey from Maine to Arlington National Cemetery. Due to inclement weather, the ceremony was held indoors, except for the actual wreath-laying at the Kemper Memorial.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Paul Fried welcomed Morrill Worcester, president of the Worcester Wreath Company, and thanked him for including Kemper Memorial Park in his yearly tribute to the country's veterans. Dr. Fried also recognized members of the Mamaroneck Board of Education and community leaders in attendance and thanked everyone for coming.

Then radio host Mike Scully delivered a moving speech tracing the history of the "Wreaths Across America" program and pointing out the importance to the community of the Kemper Memorial Park.

"Beginning in 1992, and for thirteen years, Morrill and Karen Worcester,

their family and friends made this journey from Harrington, Maine to The Arlington National Cemetery at Christmas time, in relative obscurity," explained Mr. Scully. "All of that changed in 2005, when an Air Force master sergeant took a photograph of the headstones at Arlington Cemetery, in the snow, with these beautiful green wreaths laid against them. This photograph went around the world on the Internet and many people wished they too, could be a part of this wonderful effort.



Retired U.S. Coast Guard Capt. John E. Williams presented a wreath to MHS student council president Elise Geithner.

"Wreaths Across America" was born."

"This year the wreaths will be placed at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington at exactly 12:00 noon Eastern Standard Time," continued Mr. Scully. "At that precise time, in 320 national cemeteries across the country, at 24 military installations around the world and from the decks of U.S. Navy warships at sea, wreaths will be laid in memory of all those who gave their lives for our country."

Mr. Scully placed the event in a local context, singling out two of the names on the Kemper monument, including Kathleen Cullen, a civilian.

"She lived at 11 Woodbine Avenue in Larchmont, about a mile from this park," said Mr. Scully. "She attended St. Augustine's Church and loved to sail her boat on the Long Island Sound. She volunteered for the British Ambulance Ferry Command in 1943, driving ambulances to ports on the English coast for shipment overseas. In 1944, Kathleen joined the Red Cross, working close to front line combat units in France and Belgium, aiding soldiers wounded in battle. In December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, the convent in which she was resting was hit by a rocket attack. She was 26 years old. Three days before Christmas, Kathleen Cullen was buried with full military honors in the American cemetery at Henri-Chapelle, Belgium. She is the only woman on this monument, and the only woman from this area killed in a combat zone during World War II."

Mr. Scully also mentioned James Schaefer, another Larchmont resident from Oak Bluff Avenue. "In 1944, he was a 1st Lieutenant in the 82nd Airborne Division, commanding a platoon in the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion," said Mr. Scully. Lt. Schaefer was killed, in action, on the evening of D-Day, June 6, 1944. He received the Bronze Star and was buried in the American Cemetery in Normandy.

"On the bluffs, high above Omaha Beach, the American Cemetery in Normandy is the most solemn and sacred place I have ever seen" said Mr. Scully. "In the center of rows of grave markers is a round granite chapel. The words inscribed on its walls speak for all those buried there, for the souls whose names are on the memorial here, and to all of us," concluded Mr. Scully.

*"These endured all, and gave all.
That justice among nations might prevail.
And that mankind might enjoy freedom,
and inherit peace."*

After Mr. Scully's speech, the chairman of "Wreaths Across America," retired U.S. Coast Guard Capt. John E. Williams, presented a wreath to Elise Geithner, Mamaroneck High School senior and student council president.



The assembly braved the rain for the last part of the ceremony on December 11.

The assembly then moved outside where the wreath was placed at the Kemper Memorial while MHS student Danny Fiddelman played "Taps" on his trumpet.



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