

Wreaths across Rye, Mamaroneck

Written by PAIGE RENTZ

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On the morning of Dec. 9, a symbolic convoy rode through Rye and Mamaroneck offering holiday cheer and a patriotic symbol of remembrance.

Remembering, honoring, and teaching: the convoy known as Wreaths Across America stopped in front of Rye City Hall, along Boston Post Road, and Kemper Memorial Park for the third time in the past four years.

In Rye, the convoy laid wreaths on the city's war memorial alongside City Hall with members of the Rye Post 128 of the American Legion. The legion donated \$250 to the group and Post Commander Jim Burke said his hope is that it will become an annual tradition stopping in Rye. "I think it's a great thing," Burke told us. "If you happen to see the picture of Arlington National Cemetery in the winter months with a wreath on it it's nice to remember our fallen comrades and they do. It's really taken off."



The relationship initially began back in 2007 due to the efforts of former Councilman Mack Cunningham (Ind.) and then handed over to the legion. "It was a privilege to bring Wreaths Across America back to Rye and to pay respects to our fallen veterans in honor of their sacrifice," Rye City Mayor Douglas French (R) said.

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The mayor issued a proclamation on behalf of Rye City congratulating the Worcester Wreath Company, the Wreaths Across America Organization and the Patriot Guard Riders on their past, present and future tradition of honoring those men and women who have given the ultimate sacrifice for love of country.



The procession then ventured down Boston Post Road into Mamaroneck before continuing its trek down south with a destination aimed at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. Karen Worcester, co-founder of Wreaths Across America, had a message for the teachers and students gathered at the Richard M. Kemper Memorial Park at Mamaroneck High School. Pointing to the names of the 99 locals killed in World War II, Worcester challenged the students to look up those names and learn about the lives, not the deaths of the men (and one woman) who lived in their own neighborhoods.

"I want to know if they had families; I want to know if they had kids; I want to know if they had dogs; I want to know what they liked, and I want to know what they loved, and I want you kids to know it," she said. "Because they are gone and they gave all of those things that they liked and they loved, for you, and as a community, and as a school, it's important that you don't know these as just etchings and markings, but you know their lives."

Worcester said memorializing veterans in that way is something Wreaths Across America is trying to promote among students across the nation. The organization sponsors the Million Memories Project, which encourages the preservation of the memory of veterans as a way to "remember their lives and teach future generations the value and cost of the freedoms that they enjoy." Free memory profiles can be created at <http://100memories/waa>.



"I think her point is very well-taken," said Jan Northrup, president of the Kemper Park Memorial Preservation Fund. "We've been working on that angle too. We're trying to reconstruct what kind of people they were."

Northrup said the organization, with the help of student interns, has been conducting research and interviews of locals who knew "the 99." She said the Kemper Fund is hoping to get more students involved to help conduct original research in order to piece together more information about the lives of these local heroes.

The Wreaths Across America story first began in 1992 when the Worchester Wreath Company out of Harrington, Maine began a tradition of placing wreaths on the headstones of the nation's fallen heroes at Arlington National Cemetery during the holidays. Over the years the company has donated wreaths which have been placed by volunteers at national cemeteries each December creating a stirring image of bleached white stones adorned with evergreens and red bows that commemorates those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. The wreath-laying has become an annual event on the second Saturday of December and each year the Patriot Guard Riders serve as a Veterans Honor Parade to escort the wreaths on their journey.

The movement has more than doubled since it last stopped in Westchester in 2008, when 60,000 volunteers placed over 105,000 wreaths on graves and memorials all over the United States. This year over 160,000 volunteers are working to place 216,000 wreaths at 565 locations across the globe.

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