

Soldiers honored for holidays

Volunteers place 288 wreaths on gravestones

By Courtney Flynn

cflynn@chronicle-tribune.com

Published: Sunday, December 12, 2010 1:07 AM EST

More than 200 evergreen wreaths were placed on fallen soldiers' headstones Saturday afternoon for the Wreaths Across America ceremony at Marion National Cemetery.

This was the second year the ceremony was held and there was a much greater turnout, Marion National Cemetery Director Frieda Robinson said.

Last year, Armes-Hunt Funeral Home owner Gayle Armes said there were 156 wreaths placed last year and this year there were 288. He said for every two wreaths purchased the Wreaths Across America program purchased one.

"The importance of caring for such a hallowed ground is what we find here in Marion," Jesus Fellowship Rev. and Army CSM Marion Bush Jr. said of the care put toward the graves.

There are more than 9,800 graves in the Marion National Cemetery and Bush said while the wreaths show the support and appreciation, he doesn't think there will ever be a way to truly pay back the debt they are owed for keeping this country free. He said people can pledge to live a life that shows they are worthy of what the American soldiers have done.

To be further inspired to live such a life Bush encouraged everyone to stop in the Marion National Cemetery when they are feeling lost or hopeless and to walk around the field of honors. He said to read the names and think about their stories and their families.

"All of them were somebody's son, daughter, possibly someone's father or mother," Bush said. "They all have stories."

Daughters of the American Revolution member Linda Kuester said she attended the ceremony and placed wreaths on gravestones in section 11 because of the recognition they deserve.

"It's still just as important to honor them in death," she said.

Kuester said she comes from a family where her father, husband have all served or are currently serving in the armed forces. She said she also worked at the Marion VA Medical Center for over 30 years and heard new and fascinating stories all the time.

Robinson said placing wreaths on the gravestones of fallen soldiers in national cemeteries started in 2006 when a Maine based wreath company, Worcester Wreath Company, expanded its wreath donations nationwide. Prior to this the company, with the help of a few others, placed wreaths at all the gravesites in Arlington National Cemetery.

"We will have every grave marked in due time," Robinson said of the Marion National Cemetery.