

Guardians of the National Cemetery

Official Support Committee for
Washington Crossing National Cemetery
P.O. Box 233, Newtown PA 18940-0233

To advocate for, protect the establishment of, and serve to defend, preserve and support the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County on behalf of veterans of the armed services of the United States of America.



Annual Report 2009

***Guardians of the National Cemetery
Official Support Committee for
Washington Crossing National Cemetery***

Annual Report, 2009

Directors and Officers

Antonio Albano - President
Joseph Hogan - Vice President
Daniel Worden - Secretary
Verne Rider - Treasurer

Solicitor

Michael G. Fitzpatrick, Esq.

Business Advisory Council

Commanders Advisory Council

Mailing Address

Guardians of the National Cemetery
P. O. Box 233
Newtown, PA 18940-0233

Presidents Message

In our second full year of activity we have seen continued and sustained enthusiasm for the mission of the Washington Crossing National Cemetery. We have defined more precisely our specific goals in support of the Cemetery. As of December 2009 there are 184 dues-paying members of a total recorded membership of 245. Since inception we have steadily added new members each month. An average of 35 members has attended each monthly general membership meeting and more than twenty members volunteer to serve with the Honor Guard.

Our unincorporated Association, *Guardians of the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County*, was formed on July 17, 2007 in support of the National Cemetery in Bucks County. Our 501(c)(3) Corporation, *Guardians of the National Cemetery Foundation*, was incorporated on March 4, 2008 and we attained non-profit recognition by the IRS.

Thereafter we signed a *Memorandum of Agreement* with the VA National Cemetery Administration on March 3, 2009 thereby attaining "official support committee" status.

2009 Milestones

Our first general membership meeting in March, 2009 showed membership had reached 175 and Treasury contained \$5370.39. Receipts were \$1180.00 comprised of \$590 in membership dues and \$590 in contributions).

Darrin White, Director of the Washington Crossing National Cemetery gave a presentation with a video about VA National Cemetery system. He indicated that there are approximately 150 families with cremated remains that have contacted the VA for interment at Washington Crossing National Cemetery. He explained the purpose of the support committee and the Mission of the Cemetery and our responsibility under the Memorandum of Agreement.

The contractor solicitation process was underway to select the General Contractor for cemetery construction. Eighteen companies are bidding. Phase IA of the project will be open by the end of 2009. Tony Albano read the Memorandum of Agreement signed by the VA (Darrin White, Director, Washington Crossing National Cemetery and Peter Young, Chief, Memorial Service Network 1, National Cemetery Administration) recognizing the Guardians of the National Cemetery as an Official Support Committee for the Washington Crossing National Cemetery.

On this historic occasion, former Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick was recognized for his major role in working to bring the Cemetery in Bucks County.

In May 5, 2009 we again showed an increase in membership reaching 181 paid members with a Treasury balance of \$5646.39. Disbursements were \$74.00 for rental of a Post Office Box (#233 Newtown, PA 18940) for our new mailing address and a committee was formed to plan for Veteran's Day 2009.

James McCullan, Bucks County Register of Wills, highlighting our rich history, gave a presentation concerning some of the local residents that were involved with the Christmas crossing by General George

Washington. 800 Hessians were captured and marched to Newtown where they were held by locals in the Episcopal Church after the Battles of Trenton and Princeton.

A discussion was held about the concept of contacting the schools and soliciting designs for the Guardian's Logo and awarding prizes by age group. We should consider designing a "challenge coin" for the new cemetery.

Recognizing our funding limitations with our new responsibility, we planned a visit to the Battleship New Jersey to consider using it for a future fundraiser event.

By July 7, 2009 the membership had reached 195 members with a Treasury balance of \$5886.39. Receipts were \$240.00. President Albano reported that there was a brief Memorial Day event at the cemetery site. This event was a low-key operation since the grounds are still under the control of the contractor. Consistent with our stated mission, the Guardians will have an Observance of some type on each occasion of Memorial Day and Veterans Day. The new events committee has had several meetings to plan for Veteran's Day 2009.

In September membership stood at 196 with a Treasury balance of \$6018.44. Receipts were \$190.00 (\$70 in dues and \$120 in contributions). A membership renewal mailing was sent out. Program plans are going to require more money than can be raised from membership dues alone. Since our primary source of funds is from \$10.00 member dues we are aware of an acute shortage of funds to accomplish the mission. Fund raising is becoming more urgent. Tony Albano reported that he is trying to organize a Business Advisory Committee as the first step in moving forward with a fund raising campaign.

Our National Shrine Committee is suggesting partnering with school districts across Bucks County to have students compete in a "Design the Cemetery Commemorative" campaign. The concept is quite simple:

- Contact the School Boards and propose the campaign
- The campaign is to have a student design a commemorative coin, pin, tile or other memento depicting the cemetery and/or our group.
- Students would compete by grade levels; i.e., elementary, intermediate and high school
- Each participating student would receive a certificate or a tee-shirt or hat or some form of recognition for participating
- The student submitting the design selected from each school district would receive a higher level form of recognition; i.e., participation at a future ceremony at the cemetery plus a certificate or shirt or something appropriate.
- The student who submits the selected design should receive all of the above plus something special, a \$1000.00 First Prize.
- The winning design would be used as a logo for the Cemetery or the Guardians.

Dan Worden reported on the status of construction at the cemetery site. The house at the corner of Rte. 532 and Highland Rd. has been demolished. 1789 concrete double vaults have been installed in Phase 1A and meadow grass will be planted. The cemetery will be a work in progress for the next 60 years with an ultimate capacity of 124,951 interments by 2072. Phase 1B is scheduled to go out for bid in February

2010. The first burials in Phase 1A are projected to begin in December 2009. There was a Section 106 meeting attended by the consulting parties where some individuals expressed concern that the VA was not moving fast enough to preserve and maintain the historic buildings on the site. It is important that the Guardians develop our organization such that it will exist in perpetuity to support the Cemetery mission and have a Headquarters and Museum complex near the Cemetery grounds using these historic buildings.

Guardians Honor Guard Committee

There are essentially two functions that happen at a military funeral. The first is the presentation of the flag and secondly additional honors may be provided by a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) such as American Legion or VFW, etc. There can also be an AP3 (an Authorized Provider Partnership Program) formed to serve the same as a VSO. The Guardians can serve as our chartered mission to support the Washington Crossing National Cemetery. The management functions of organizing, recruiting and scheduling of Honor Guard Teams (HGT) would be the responsibility of the Guardians. The responsibility of the HGT would be to fold the flag, play the bugle, firing party, pall bearers and casket guards. Training for these duties is very specific and is available from the Military Funeral Honor Guard organizations in PA and NJ. Although the primary HGT support will come from the Guardians, this will depend on cooperation and support of VSO's within a 25 mile radius of the cemetery. VSO's with Honor Guards would be the nucleus. The committee will find out which VSO's are interested and then canvass their membership for interest. Lastly the program will be publicized to reach out to veterans who may not be affiliated, but are willing to serve. There is a stipend of \$50 per trip/team. In addition there is a website that offers grants for M1 rifles for ceremonial use by the Honor Guards.

Events Committee

We reviewed a 16 page spreadsheet developed by Joe Longmore outlining the planning for the Memorial Day 2010 event. Originally the plan was related to Veteran's Day 2009 but the cemetery property will not be available by that date. The draft plan and logistics have been developed. Now it will be necessary to determine a budget and see how much of the plan can be accomplished. We need a fund raising effort and perhaps secure a grant from the Bucks County Tourism Board.

Annual Veterans Dinner Fundraiser

Joe Hogan announced that plans to use the fantail on the battleship USS New Jersey for a fund raising event this year have been postponed to next year, June 2010, essentially because we lack the initial of funds for planning purposes.

Wreaths Across America

Verne Rider will be contacting *Wreaths Across America* to find out how our Cemetery might participate.

With membership at 203 in October we showed a Treasury balance of \$6148.44. Receipts were \$130.00 (\$70 in dues and \$60 in contributions).

Tony Albano reported that he is making progress in interesting local business organizations to provide financial support to the Guardians. He is also identifying companies that can offer individuals to participate in a Business Advisory Committee that can serve as a base for a fund raising campaign. This is an essential effort since we can not raise enough money from dues alone to support our plans.

The Guardians Honor Guard Committee will begin regular meetings on Tuesday October 20 at 7 PM.

Events Committee

Since we do not have access to the Cemetery grounds, Veteran's Day event is scheduled for the Washington Crossing Visitors Center on November 11th. Part of planning for the Memorial Day 2010 event we met with the County Commissioners on November 12, 2009 to determine how much logistical and financial support the County can provide to underwrite the event. It will be necessary to determine a budget and see how much of the plan can be accomplished. Some of the items that need to be identified from a cost standpoint are tents, buses, insurance, port-a-potties, offsite parking lots, Washington Crossing re-enactors and emergency services and facilities to assist the elderly and handicapped veterans. Without financial support we will not be able to plan for much of an event.

Annual Veterans Dinner Fundraiser

Joe Hogan announced that plans to use the USS New Jersey for a fund raising event are dependent on raising \$3000.00 seed money to underwrite the event. We do not have the funds to launch the fundraiser event and this may have to be postponed until the Cemetery is in operation and the Guardian activities are up and running with identified budgets and sources of revenue. We need to find corporate sponsors and identify a prominent guest speaker that will appeal to the veterans' community and their families.

Wreaths Across America

Verne Rider has contacted Wreath Across America. We hope to cooperate with local schools for participation by school children, Boy Scouts etc. so that our cemetery might participate in the annual wreath laying ceremony.

National Shrine Committee

Logo Art Committee is the first event under the National Shrine Committee. The purpose is to raise public awareness of the mission of Washington Crossing National Cemetery. We are soliciting funds to subsidize the contest.

November membership stands at 210 with a Treasury balance of \$6733.44. Receipts were \$585.00 (\$130 in dues and \$455 in contributions). A renewal membership mailing was sent in November for the 2010 period.

VA National Cemetery Administration Officials regularly attend our meetings. Darrin White, Director, introduced the new Cemetery Administrative Officer, David Kolmetzky. Kimberly Wright, Director of Memorial Service Network, also attended the meeting.

Tony Albano reported that he had met with General Scott Wagner, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans and Military Affairs, PA National Guard at Fort Indiantown Gap. A stipend may be possible for our Guardians Honor Guard and he is pursuing that possibility with the Commonwealth.

The Executive Committee meeting on October 27, 2009 discussed the need for every Guardian to portray a professional public image so that the public perception is maintained at the highest level. A Policy and Procedures Manual has been prepared and adopted covering Personnel, Expenses, Communications, Advisory Councils, Committee Chair Duties, Program Activities and Expulsion. Darrin White and Tony Albano explained the need to follow Chain of Command and that ultimately all activities concerning the Cemetery were to be carried out under the authority of the Cemetery Director. This is covered under the Personnel Policy Statement *"All personnel acting on behalf of the Guardians of the National Cemetery Official Support Committee for the Washington Crossing National Cemetery must complete a Guardians volunteer application form and the Executive Committee must approve participation on the Support Committee. Applications shall be specific for Association Membership, or Honor Guard Services, or Cemetery Volunteer Services. All Guardians personnel shall adhere to procedures established by the Director of the National Cemetery and are subject to administrative discipline by Executive Committee review."*

Darrin White further reiterated his a passion for the new Cemetery and he reminded the Guardians that when Guardians represent the Cemetery our behavior reflects on the Cemetery. He asked us to carry out our roles in a respectful manner to make the Cemetery a world class operation. Our support has to be conducted in an organized manner. Communication with the media should be done through proper channels. There should be no unauthorized use of letterheads, logos or websites.

Darrin White reported that Phase 1A of the National Cemetery is on schedule and that he and his staff will be moving to the site on or about December 7. He is interviewing for the Foreman position. There are 260 interment reservations already and it's expected that the first burials will take place in late December or the first part of January. They expect to have as many as 10-12 burials per day.

Business Advisory Committee

Tony Albano reported that he is continuing to make progress in communicating with Lockheed Martin, Toll, Prodesco and Comcast to provide support to the Guardians. Boeing has declined at this time. He is also identifying other Companies that can offer individuals to participate in a Business Advisory Committee that can serve as a base for a fund raising campaign.

Events Committee

Larry Rubini updated the planning underway for the Memorial Day 2010 event. A meeting with the County Commissioners was held on November 12, 2009 to determine how much logistical and financial support the County can provide to underwrite or support the event.

Honor Guard Committee

The Honor Guard Committee has met three times and they are still looking for more volunteers to serve as Honor Guards. Some of the questions that need to be addressed are 1) Where to store the weapons and how to secure a quantity of ammunition blanks 2) The need for a live bugler 3) Adding more New Jersey veterans. There is a bugler from Bensalem and there is an organization called Bugles Across America that can be contacted.

Another increase in membership was recorded in December with 220 total members; Treasury balance was \$3898.93. Receipts were \$1540.00 (\$610 in dues and \$930 in contributions). Disbursements for the period consisted of \$44.51 for application and ID card printing and a transfer of \$4,364.51 in donations to the Guardians of the National Cemetery Foundation.

Treasurer Verne Rider provided two Treasurer's Re-Statement of Funds for September and October 2009. September's original opening balance was \$6,018.44. Restated receipts were \$120 which resulted in a closing balance of \$6,138.44. October's restated opening balance was \$6,138.44. Receipts were \$585. The October restated closing balance was \$6,723.44.

Darrin White introduced the Cemetery Senior Engineer Dick Kollar.

Tony Albano reported that two Business Advisory Members will be appointed by Prodesco and Lockheed Martin. He also contacted legislators for revision to Commonwealth law to include Honor Guard services at Washington Crossing National Cemetery. Senator Thompson and Representative Petri agreed to sponsor legislation changing the State Law to allow the Washington Crossing Cemetery honor guard volunteers to receive a stipend. We have also applied to the Department of the Army for Ceremonial Rifles for use by the Honor Guard.

National Shrine Committee

Tony Albano announced that Bob Castor has donated \$1000 to fund development of a cemetery logo. Bob Castor will chair the committee to develop the logo. Possible individuals to assist with the development of the logo are Sam Evans (former teacher), Mike Lecker (school principal), Dave Blatt (former school superintendent), Barry Pilla (Police Chief) and Carl Lavo (newspaper publisher).

Wreaths Across America

There will be a modest wreath laying ceremony at the Cemetery on December 12th. We are looking for some volunteers to participate.

Darrin White reported that Phase 1A of the National Cemetery is on schedule and that he and his staff have moved to the site. 150,000 sq. ft. of sod has been installed. Cremation vaults are 4' by 4'; Caskets are 3' by 8'. It's expected that the first burials will take place in the second half of January. The first day of burial will be a private event for the families. Burials will be scheduled and families will be called in the order of reservations. The official address of the new cemetery is 830 Highland Road, Newtown, PA 18940

Honor Guard Committee

Honor Guard Committee has continued to meet and they are still looking for more volunteers. Currently 5-7 have volunteered. Honor Guard Committee visited the Warminster VFW post and made a presentation. The volunteers are being trained at the American Legion Post 79. Rifle training is taking place as well as live buglers, flag folding and presentation of the flag. Some of the questions that need to be addressed are 1) Where to store the weapons and how to secure a quantity of ammunition blanks (Rock Island, Ill depot can supply the ammunition) 2) Decisions need to be made about uniforms: trousers, jacket, , white shirt and black tie, top coat, head gear, black shoes and sox, white gloves, raincoat,. It is estimated that the cost to outfit each honor guard member will be \$140-\$180. Corfan shoes are \$85. Service grade M-1's cost \$595 + \$22 shipping. They can be shipped 6-9 months from the time the paperwork is received. We do not have the funds to completely supply the Honor Guard members. With an average of \$150 per member, a target of 80 members would cost \$12,000 just for basic uniforms. A fundraising effort is a must.

Events Committee

Larry Rubini updated the planning underway for the Memorial Day 2010 event. Approximately 200-500 may participate. Barry Pilla advised that the Incident Command could be activated. Fire police volunteers will be needed from the township. The ICT building parking lot may be used. Darrin White indicated that families of deceased veterans will be there and they may need parking. He reminded the membership that partisan political remarks on cemetery grounds are not allowed and the cemetery must be open to the public.

Historical Narrative

It is evident that we have a full program of activity evolving. Historically our organization of local activists formed immediately after the historic vote by the Council Rock School District Board to sell the Melsky tract of land. This critical vote enabled the land transfers that made the National Cemetery a reality in Bucks County.

In a dark parking lot nine men then pledged to organize and form the '*Guardians of the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County*' an unincorporated association. Each man contributed twenty dollars for the effort for a total war-chest of \$180.00. The name of "*Guardians*" was suggested by Dan Fraley as symbolic of our mission and our resolve and was immediately and enthusiastically adopted by those present. Mike Fitzpatrick offered pro bono legal representation. These veterans vowed to organize and to

make sure that the voices of veterans in support of the National Cemetery would be heard forcefully in the halls of government, in the media and in the courts.

Immediately thereafter, papers were filed with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on July 21, 2007, after our first organizational meeting on July 17, 2007. The Edgar H. Denson American Legion Post 79 of New Hope, Pennsylvania graciously provided us with space for our first and subsequent meetings.

Our founding organizers included: Antonio Albano, Fred Caldwell, Wayne Chapman, Dan Fraley, Ed Hackett, Joe Hogan, Frank O'Donnell, Larry Rubini, and Daniel Worden.

And we adopted the following Mission Statement: "*To advocate for, protect the establishment of, and serve to defend, preserve and support the National Veterans Cemetery, Bucks County on behalf of veterans of the armed services of the United States of America.*" When the Guardians had 18 members, By-Laws and Officers were voted on and adopted unanimously.

Within six months of existence, by December 2007, membership was over 100 members and our treasury had reached \$4010.00. The name we recommended, **Washington Crossing National Cemetery**, was officially adopted by the Veterans Administration, National Cemetery Administration for the proposed facility.

Membership began to swell almost immediately and public and veterans' community enthusiasm continues to this day. General members pay a nominal membership fee and revenue raised will also provide limited support to veteran's families for interment purposes. The Guardians membership became very active and responded to numerous legal challenges to the National Cemetery development. The members of the Guardians began to attend more court hearings and public government meetings in large numbers. As new members joined the Association the first charitable contributions purchased our banner and the American Legion Post 79 donated \$1000.00 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6493 gave \$250.00. It became evident that donations would be a significant resource for support of our mission and donations were received from a number of labor union and small businesses.

We saw immediate popular support for planned Avenue of Flags for Memorial Day and Veterans Day and forming a support committee for families of departed veterans. In addition we proposed a program to raise public awareness through the creation of a public shrine enlisting the aid of the 58 veteran's organizations in Bucks County.

At the Meeting of April 1, 2008 we announced that the land for the National Veteran's Cemetery has been transferred from Toll Brothers to the VA. The room burst out in uproarious and sustained applause. Immediately thereafter, the Disabled American Veterans Lower Bucks County Chapter 117 held a Commander's Testimonial Dinner in May, 2008 honoring Mike Fitzpatrick, Patrick Murphy, Dan Fraley, and Bill Tuerk for their activities in support of the VA Cemetery.

Darrin W. White was named as the new Director for the Washington Crossing National Cemetery. Our organization is becoming more formal so that ID cards, publications, websites etc., will be necessary. We assisted the National Cemetery Administration in planning for the formal Groundbreaking and Dedication of the Washington Crossing National Cemetery attended by well over one thousand people. We have video documentation of ceremonies on Veterans Day 2007, 2008 and Washington Crossing National

Cemetery Groundbreaking 2008. These videos along with hundreds of still photographs by our members will eventually be posted on our website.

We have requested leasehold for the historical buildings on the cemetery site as our headquarters and museum and we were invited to sign a memorandum of agreement with VA to be a Support Committee for Washing Crossing National Cemetery.

Goals for 2010

- Establish Headquarters and Museum
- Promote Logo Art contest at area schools
- Create Commanders Advisory Council representing all veterans organizations
- Develop the Honor Guard with eighty trained volunteers for schedule rotation
- Develop Events Committee to coordinate commemorative events.
- Organize Business Advisory Council to begin public fundraising efforts.

Given the sustained enthusiasm and support by veterans and the general community we are looking forward to a vital and rewarding program of support for the Washington Crossing National Cemetery in perpetuity.

The Audit Committee Report certifying the treasury balance and membership is attached. Our organization has continued to grow as an Official Support Committee for Washington Crossing National Cemetery. Our members have pledged to faithfully fulfill the duties of this sacred trust in furtherance of the mission of this National Shrine in Newtown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Antonio Albano

Antonio Albano,
President

REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

For the year 2009, the Audit Committee of the Board of Directors has reviewed and examined the books and records of the Treasurer of the Guardians of the National Cemetery Foundation.

The audit committee finds that the books and records are in good order and the Audit Committee certifies them as complete and accurate in every respect.

/s/ Edward Hackett

Edward Hackett
Chairman of the Audit Committee

Attest:

/s/ Daniel Worden

Daniel Worden
Secretary