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News Release

**Three Supervisor of Elections Employees  
Launch Wreaths Across America Program in  
Indian River County**

Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, wreath-laying ceremonies are conducted at more than 4,000-plus locations in all 50 U.S. states, at sea and abroad. The mission of the Wreaths Across America organization is to remember the fallen, honor those who serve, and to teach our children the value of freedom.

This initiative pays tribute to the sacrifices made by our service men and women by adorning their final resting places with festive wreaths. The ceremony includes remarks from local organizers, along with a solemn wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the dedication and service of those who served our country.

In 2017, when Joe and Sue Crowley moved to Vero Beach from Massachusetts, they wanted to take part in our local National Wreaths Across America Day. They quickly learned this program did not exist in our county.

In 2018, Joe and Sue approached the local veterans' agent seeking to launch the Wreaths Across America program in Indian River County. They were told that they were welcome to organize the event, but that they were pretty much on their own to see the program through.

Joe and Sue, both retired firefighters, accepted the challenge. A friend, Rick Lewis, overheard the couple's discussion about their plans to spearhead the program in the county and Rick said, "I'm in!" Rick is a retired City of Vero Beach employee and is very involved in local veteran organizations. With Rick's connections, the three were able to form a small committee and the work began.

Wreaths Across America Location Coordinators work throughout the year with cemetery contacts and local governments to organize and promote the ceremony, coordinate wreath delivery and manage the placement of wreaths. In addition to location coordinators, the assistance of community members, local businesses, civic groups and organizations are relied upon to place wreaths on the day of the event.

Not only is the logistics of the program a daunting task, but funds must be raised to buy the wreaths. The first year, Joe, Sue and Rick raised enough money to place wreaths on two-thirds of veterans' graves at Crestlawn Cemetery and all of Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary in Vero Beach. During the wreath ceremony on Memorial Island, the trio committed to all in attendance that they would cover all veterans' graves at Crestlawn Cemetery the following year.

In 2019, in addition to placing wreaths at Crestlawn Cemetery and Veterans Memorial Island, the trio decided to expand north to cover Sebastian Municipal Cemetery. Their five-year goal was to raise enough money to place a wreath on every veteran's grave in the county. Even through the 2020 pandemic, the trio achieved their fund-raising goals to continue the program.

Since 2021, these dynamic individuals have raised enough funds to honor every veteran buried in Indian River County. Even the little known Oslo Cemetery on Old Dixie Highway receives wreaths. This county has been extremely generous and online donations appear weekly. Enough money has been raised for nearly 3,000 wreaths each year, which translates to nearly \$30,000.

Upon retirement from the Ludlow Fire Department in Massachusetts, Joe and Sue continued their roles as civil servants by serving at the Elections Office. The couple volunteered to serve as poll workers. Sue serves as a Clerk on Election Day and has assisted the Vote-By-Mail Department. Joe began his service at the Elections Office as a Poll Deputy and then was recruited to work in the warehouse as the Logistics and Equipment Manager. Rick Lewis serves as a Field Technician. Field Technicians receive specialized training to troubleshoot and provide assistance with equipment at the polling place.

It takes special people to coordinate and implement the Wreaths Across America program. Volunteers and donors are encouraged to participate in this heartfelt initiative. To make a donation visit [WreathsAcrossAmerica.org/fl0500](http://WreathsAcrossAmerica.org/fl0500) or to get involved email [wreathsirc@gmail.com](mailto:wreathsirc@gmail.com).

### **2023 National Wreaths Across America Day**

National Wreaths Across America Day is Dec. 16, 2023. This year's wreath-laying ceremonies will be at 10 a.m. at Crestlawn Cemetery, 1216 14<sup>th</sup> St., Vero Beach, and 10:30 a.m. at Sebastian Municipal Cemetery, 1921 N. Central Ave., Sebastian. A ceremony is not planned on Veterans Memorial Island Sanctuary because it is temporarily closed this year due to construction in the area.

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