Patriot Plaza, the 2800 seat amphitheater and outdoor museum at Sarasota National Cemetery, was designed, constructed and gifted to our community and the nation by The Patterson Foundation in 2014 with only funding from this charitable foundation, not one taxpayer dollar. This first-ever partnership between the Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA), and a private foundation, The Patterson Foundation, sparked the interest of many communities across the nation to honor veterans, inspire patriotism and embrace freedom at their national cemeteries. To follow the impact that Patriot Plaza has had since the dedication in 2014, click here to see the Annual Impact report from 2014 to 2019.

Many of our nation’s over 150 VA national cemeteries are currently working with either private foundations or non-profit organizations to provide enhancements to our national cemeteries. Alabama and Georgia National Cemeteries each have a 501(c)3 non-profit organization supporting their cemetery and its management team by providing ongoing participation in cemetery and community events commemorating US military veterans. Both the Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery and the Georgia National Cemetery Advisory Council are 100% volunteer-operated organizations that are also dedicated to enhancing their national shrine by designing, funding construction, donating the improvement to that facility and gifting an endowment for the capital maintenance of the enhancement. Representatives from both of these support organizations visited Patriot Plaza while exploring ways to honor their veterans.
Representatives from both of these support organizations visited Patriot Plaza while exploring ways to honor their heroes and family sacrifices at their national cemeteries and we are proud to share an update on their work to date. All three projects demonstrate that government funds good, philanthropy funds imaginative excellence.

**ALABAMA NATIONAL CEMETERY**

Alabama National Cemetery is a 479-acre site located at 3133 Highway 119, 15 miles south of Birmingham, just north of the town of Montevallo and west of Interstate Highway 65. The cemetery currently has 54 developed acres as a final resting place for veterans and eligible family members, with the first burials on June 25, 2009. Today the cemetery is nearing 9,000 burials and is growing at a rapid pace. When fully developed the Alabama National Cemetery will be the final resting place for over 225,000 veterans.

In January 2013 the Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery, while standing on a gently sloping hillside that overlooks a bend in Shoal Creek running through the Alabama National Cemetery site in Montevallo, saw more than a picturesque scene but an opportunity to provide a scenic overlook for meditation and a place where the families of veterans can gather after attending services for their loved ones. During the next six years the cemetery’s support committee raised more than $600,000 from generous donors for the design, construction, and an endowment for the capital maintenance of the overlook. The generosity of the community was demonstrated by In-Kind donations in the form of inspections by local government and various construction activities by contractors.

The scenic overlook is a circular pad which sits 40 feet above an elbow turn in Shoal Creek and is accessible by a path starting behind the columbarium. The view provides comfort along with the emotional connection to nature when meditating and listening to the rapids.

The September 6, 2019 groundbreaking ceremony marked the beginning of construction of the scenic overlook at the Alabama National Cemetery. The Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery.

**GEORGIA NATIONAL CEMETERY**

Georgia National Cemetery opened for burials on April 24, 2006, providing 39,000 sites for traditional casket graves as well as disposition of cremation remains in burial plots, in addition to a scattering garden and columbarium. The cemetery occupies 91 developed acres of a 775-acre site donated by a private citizen to the National Cemetery Administration. The site lies midway between Cartersville and Canton, near the Etowah River, offering views of the Appalachian Mountains and Lake Allatoona.

The Georgia National Cemetery Advisory Council envisioned enhancing their national shrine with a carillon and 40 ft bell tower. The donation was designed to provide patriotic music to echo throughout the mountaintop cemetery. This donation, known as the Veterans Tribute Tower, is a four-story, state-of-the-art carillon bell tower. It stands as a beacon of appreciation to veterans - past, present, and future. The Veterans Tribute Tower was made in the USA by the Verdin Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. After countless delays and a pandemic, this Tower stands! Across from the carillon is a 12 x 16 viewing area with benches, a wall surrounding it that is 2 feet tall and strong enough to sit on, and a marble monument, all donated by a local family. A plaque was added to the monument donated by the tower manufacturer.

The Veterans Tribute Tower has three functional cast bronze bells in addition to a state-of-the-art Schulmerich g5 Carillon audio system which plays more than 7,800 musical selections in various genres or voices. The carillon plays a selection of songs ranging from 15-18 minutes daily at different times and can be heard across the entire national cemetery. The tower’s bells have their own history. The bells...
Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery donated the scenic overlook to the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration on January 30, 2020 and planned a ribbon cutting and dedication for March. While Covid-19 forced the cancellation of the ceremony, enthusiasm for the project is stronger than ever. The community responded with many messages of appreciation and visitors are regularly using the overlook for the purpose for which it was intended. Additional information can be found at the Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery's website and Facebook page.

The Scenic Overlook at the Alabama National Cemetery has received tremendous feedback from visitors. A few of the words to describe their response include: Breathtaking! Majestic! Peaceful, Touching and Respectful.

The tower’s bells have their own history. The bells were cast, in part, by military medals and other mementos from American wars. Contributors mailed in items old and new from near and far. Each item has a rich story which will be archived and preserved. The bells were cast with these items on March 6, 2020 during a touching ceremony at the Verdin Foundry.

On May 15, 2020, the Tower was transported across four state lines by an Honor Guard escort of motorcycle riders from the Patriot Guard Riders, American Legion Riders, and over 125 veteran riders in addition to countless first responders and 30 corvettes. The Honor Escort began in Ohio and gathered more along the way in Kentucky and Tennessee. The last stop in Georgia prior to arriving at the cemetery added more motorcycle riders and the 30 corvettes. Upon arrival the escort made a loop throughout the cemetery with more riders entering as the first of the riders departed in one long stream of honor to our veterans. The Veterans Tribute Tower was installed on May 16, 2020.

The Veterans Tribute Tower was completely funded by generous donations made through the 501(c)3 non-profit, the Georgia National Cemetery Advisory Council, in addition to donations In-Kind by many of the contractors working on this project. This 100% volunteer-operated organization raised nearly $400,000 to fund this project, including the hardscaping and landscaping around the Tower. In-Kind donations included the engineering, electrical, digging and pouring of the concrete for the tower pad and even the two 40 ton cranes that were used to set the tower. A celebration and dedication of the Veterans Tribute Tower will be coordinated for a later date. The Veterans Tribute Tower is located at the traffic circle just past the Public Information Center at Georgia National Cemetery. Address: 101 Scott Hudgens Drive, Canton GA 30114. Additional information can be found at the Georgia National Cemetery Advisory Council's website and Facebook page.
The center of the Scenic Overlook is inscribed with E PLURIBUS UNUM, which is Latin for "Out of many, One". Here the star symbolizes our Veteran, our One.
Congratulations to the Support Committee of the Alabama National Cemetery and the Georgia National Cemetery Advisory Council, the many donors, and their communities for the completion of these projects. Thank you for your tireless work demonstrating your dedication and patriotism in honoring veterans.

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Share this newsletter with friends, family, and co-workers. To be added to the distribution, send your request to Linda Gould at LLGouldsrq@gmail.com.

Follow and "Like" our Legacy of Valor Facebook page for inspirational and informative posts covering national and local topics concerning veterans.

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