



#### ◆ UPDATES

The Veterans Legacy Summit (VLS), an extraordinary series of events that brought individuals, organizations and foundations together from over 25 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, is now three weeks behind us, yet its impact continues to ripple throughout members of our community and beyond. Here are just a few examples of the touches VLS has made and how its mission lives on through those who attended and participated.

#### FILM FESTIVAL

The Veterans Legacy Film Festival brought together several thousand audience members of all ages to experience a wide range of films connected to service and patriotism. More than 2,600 5th and 7th graders throughout Sarasota County saw the film *We The People*. Their enthusiasm and excitement was demonstrated by their complete involvement in the pre-show trivia questions focused on early American History. They cheered and clapped as the correct answers were revealed.

One of the most moving stories from the Film Festival was shared with Beth Duda, Film Festival Producer. One of the volunteers, Joan, heard about the Film Festival at her volunteer orientation meeting. She was particularly interested in seeing the Soledad O'Brien film, *The Way Comes Home*, featuring the *Save a Warrior* program. Joan asked her husband, a mental health professional to join her for the Friday night showing. The film, and the work of the *Save a Warrior* program inspired Joan's husband to immediately reach out to a client of his, a veteran who has been having a great deal of difficulty dealing with his experiences, even considering suicide. That phone call, late on Friday night, resulted in the veteran attending *Celebrate Service and Sacrifice* the next day with Joan's husband. They met Jake Clark, creator and Executive Director of *Save a Warrior*, and initial plans were made for the veteran to attend the *Save a Warrior* program in Malibu.



#### ZONED IN

WUSF Veterans Coming Home recently aired on WUSF 89.7 its panel discussion -- "The Veterans Transition: Opening Up Doors for ReEntry" -- that was taped in front of a live audience on Nov. 15 at Florida Studio Theatre during "Zoned In," an educational component of VLS. During the session, moderated by Florida Military host Carson Cooper, the three panelists -- Eric Garcia, Colleen Kropfakers and Todd Westor -- candidly shared first-hand experiences when they were veterans returning home and the supportive services they now provide in their work at Team Red, White, and Blue; the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs; and St. Leo University's Veteran Student Services Offices, respectively.

In addition, Bobbie O'Brien, WUSF Veterans Coming Home Coordinator, is planning stories "stimulated by the Veterans Legacy Summit" on the veteran-serving organizations that she met at Zoned In and at the Legacy Zone, such as *Wreaths on the Water* and *Wreaths Across America*. She reported that she already had an opportunity to interview Rob Walker of No Veteran Left Behind while they were both at the VLS, and she aired that story recently as well on WUSF 89.7 FM. Air dates of future featured stories will be posted on the *WUSF Veterans Coming Home* website.

#### LEGACY ZONE

Over two dozen national-level organizations that serve and support military and their families were on hand at the Legacy Zone on Saturday, Nov. 15 at Sarasota National Cemetery. As hundreds of people streamed toward Patriot Plaza for the *Celebrate Service and Sacrifice* program, many stopped to learn, connect and share their stories with organizations ranging from *Heroes On The Water* to the *US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Bring our Heroes Home* program. World War II veterans, Korean Veterans and Vietnam Veterans wore their insignias and emblems proudly and shared stories of where they served and when with each other and younger military, such as the Active Duty US Army Recruiters that were also present in the Legacy Zone that day. It was a cross generational experience and many were eager to learn more about the myriad of programs being showcased in order to find out how they could share their own time, talent or treasure to keep the support flowing nationally but also on a local and more personal level.



#### CELEBRATE SERVICE & SACRIFICE

*Celebrate Service and Sacrifice* at Patriot Plaza was a heartfelt and often moving tribute to the five branches of the military and the men and women have served, are serving, and will serve in the future. The ceremonial presentation of the Garrison Flag, the West Point Band's rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, young children leading the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the sight of more than 25 young men and women taking their oath of enlistment were moments that brought chills and tears to many of the members of the audience. It was a very proud day to be an American.

#### THE WEST POINT BAND CONCERT

Sunday, Nov. 16, after the pomp and circumstance of *Celebrate Service and Sacrifice* at Patriot Plaza, The West Point Band's Community Concert on Sunday was a chance to share the joy of the Veterans Legacy Summit with the community. The band played a wide selection of music that had the audience clapping, beaming, and tapping their toes. The concert even had the audience jumping to its feet on more than one occasion. Patriot Plaza was swinging as *The West Point Band* presented an Andrews Sisters Medley, complete with dancing in the aisles. Perhaps one of the most moving moments came when the band's vocalist, Merley Kay Messenger, invited the audience to join her in singing *God Bless America*. With the American flag flying proudly overhead, the voices of children, and adults, veterans, and family member of veterans joined together to sing, *God Bless America, Our home, sweet home*.



#### WEST POINT BAND EDUCATION OUTREACH

On Monday, Nov. 17, The West Point Band held a concert at Sarasota High School (SHS) creating a once-in-a-lifetime experience for both teachers and students. As the students entered the theatre, their eyes were fixed on the uniforms and the band warming up on stage. Following the welcome from the staff at SHS, the concert began and the room was absorbed by the music and history of West Point.

Following the concert, the students broke out into full master classes with several of the band members working personally with them. Having professional musicians come in and teach master classes was one of the highlights of the school year. Some of the comments from the students were "That was awesome!", "They were great", "I'd like to go to that school!"

#### ◆ WAYS TO CONNECT

##### NOMINATE A VETERAN BY DEC. 22

The Jewish Family and Children's Service of the Suncoast (JFCS) is currently seeking nominations from the community for veterans who inspire patriotism, provide service to others and offer hope to veterans. The awardees will be recognized at the 3rd Annual Tribute to Veterans Service to Community Awards Luncheon on May 29, 2015.

Nominations must be submitted by 5pm on Monday, Dec. 22. To learn more about criteria for nominations, or for the nomination form, click [here](#).

#### ◆ SEEN & HEARD

The experiences, stories and memories from the Veterans Legacy Summit (VLS) continue to come in. Click below to read personal reflections from two VLS Participants.

[Ann Hirsch, Patriot Plaza Artist](#)

[Sharonne Hawkes, Forever Miss America and VLS Emcee](#)

#### ◆ THE FINAL WORD

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day - Sunday, Dec. 7

*"Everybody knows about Pearl Harbor. The thing that really fascinated me is that through this tragedy there was this amazing American heroism."*

— Michael Bay, movie director

[patriotplaza.thepattersonfoundation.org](http://patriotplaza.thepattersonfoundation.org)  
Created by The Patterson Foundation.

#### ◆ DID YOU KNOW?

Saturday, Dec. 13, is *Wreaths Across America Day* where memorial wreaths are placed on veterans' graves by thousands of volunteers wanting to honor and remember veterans.

Currently over 800 locations participate in *Wreaths Across America*, laying memorial wreaths on veterans graves.

Sarasota National Cemetery is one of the locations that participates in *Wreaths Across America*.

Sarasota Military Academy (SMA) and several veterans groups have been spearheading the Sarasota *Wreaths Across America* efforts since Sarasota National Cemetery broke ground in 2008. To learn more, click [here](#).

In 2013, over 6,000 memorial wreaths were placed at the Sarasota National Cemetery on veteran graves. This year, there will be over 8,000 memorial wreaths placed.

To volunteer this year for the Sarasota National Cemetery *Wreaths Across America*, click [here](#) or arrive at Sarasota National Cemetery by 8:30am on Saturday, Dec. 13. The memorial wreath laying ceremony begins officially at 11:30am.

*Wreaths Across America* formed officially in 2007, becoming a recognized nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, but its roots date back to 1992 when Merrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, placed the first large batch of memorial wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery.

The mission of *Wreaths Across America* is simple: Remember, Honor, Teach. To learn more, click [here](#).

#### ◆ SUBMIT IDEAS

Have an upcoming event honoring veterans, a way for the community to continue to connect with veteran-related services or activities, or a special veteran-honoring project your organization is proud of that you want to share with the community through the newsletter? Please share by sending to:

Erika Kelly  
[ekelly@vls@gmail.com](mailto:ekelly@vls@gmail.com)

#### Stay Connected

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