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VA national cemeteries welcome nonprofit volunteers providing tree-and landscape-care services

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that its [National Cemetery Administration](#) is partnering with more than 2,000 green-industry professionals across the country Sept. 19 to host “[Saluting Branches: Arborists United for Veteran Remembrance](#),” an opportunity for tree-care professionals to help maintain and beautify VA cemeteries.

“The work and volunteerism of Saluting Branches shows everyone has unique skills and abilities that can contribute to recognizing and honoring the sacrifice of America’s Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We partner with communities and organizations across the nation to help build the national profile and importance of honoring Veterans through memorialization.”

The volunteers will donate a full day’s work, including pruning and trimming, to 53 Veterans cemeteries around the country as a way of honoring Veterans and their families. Of the 53 cemeteries hosting volunteers, 36 are VA national cemeteries. Last year, volunteers donated an estimated \$4 million in services.

“We developed Saluting Branches as a green-industry project to honor Veterans and improve the environment through the science of tree care,” said Deb Peterson, Saluting Branches coordinator. “This is an important event for the arborist community and allows us to give back to those who have served us.”

Rainbow Treecare, located in Minnetonka, Minnesota, created the Saluting Branches Day of Service at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

VA operates 136 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers’ lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA’s national cemeteries. VA also provides funding to establish, expand, improve and maintain 111 Veterans cemeteries in 48 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan.

For Veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2017, VA honored more than 361,892 Veterans and their loved ones with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal and private cemeteries.

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