



# PATRIOT PARK

HONORING THOSE WHO FOUGHT  
THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

# December 2023 News & Updates

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## President's Report

As the season draws to a close, let's take a moment to look back on the incredible journey of 2023! It's been a year filled with heartfelt gestures and meaningful endeavors at Patriot Park.

70+ students representing five local school districts came together to plant an astounding 7054 flags for our Field of Heroes Flag Display in record time. Our May 28th memorial ceremony was a moving tribute, highlighted by decorated combat veteran Earl Granville's inspiring words, music by the Bellwood Community Choir and the Central City VFW Post 7457 as Honor Guard. During this event, we unveiled a new storyboard honoring the fallen heroes of the PA Army National Guard 55th Brigade Combat Team.

Throughout July, the Veterans and Athletes United Memorial Flag graced our park, followed by a soul-stirring concert on July 12, generously supporting Tunnel to Towers. Our August fundraising dinner, featuring the remarkable

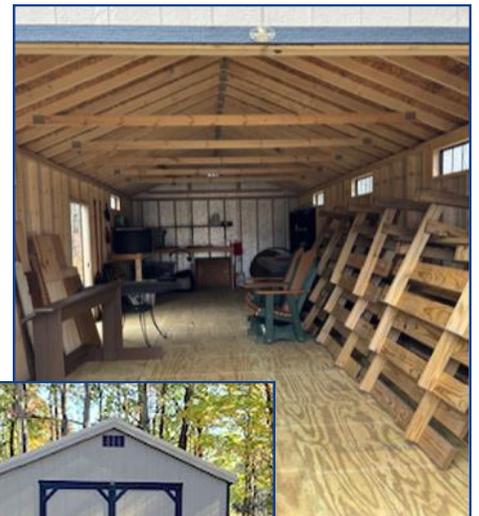


*Earl Granville and  
Gold Star Dad Bill Evans*

Rocky Bleier, a four-time Super Bowl winner and Purple Heart recipient, drew over 300 attendees and marked yet another resounding success.

This year has been one of transformations and enhancements. From the installation of a Blue Star Memorial Marker and picturesque landscaping by the Somerset Garden Club to the addition of a serene meditation area with Adirondack chairs, every step was aimed at providing solace and reflection for our visitors.

The generosity of donors and supporters allowed for significant expansions, including the addition of a desert camo Humvee for display, improved parking areas for buses and motorcycles, and the purchase of a 14-foot by 32-foot shed. This shed not only houses essential supplies but also facilitated the demolition of an old motel building, finally revealing the Park's beauty from Route 30.



*New storage  
shed*



*Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker*

Visitation soared compared to the previous year, attracting school field trips and motor coach tours. Our community of supporters grew substantially, paving the way for the emergence of dedicated volunteers. Yet, amidst these accomplishments, the truest victory lies in providing a sanctuary for Gold Star families, honoring GWOT veterans, and inspiring all visitors to live lives worthy of the sacrifices made on their behalf.

As we eagerly await 2024, we're brimming with hope and excitement for the promising future ahead. Thank you for being a part of our journey—we're deeply grateful for your unwavering support in preserving the legacy of our heroes.

THANK YOU! – **Randy Musser**

## Flag Retirement Ceremony

On November 12th, Patriot Park bid a poignant farewell to the Field of Heroes Flag Display. With the onset of harsh winter weather in Somerset County, preserving the flags throughout the season becomes impractical. As tradition dictates, following Veterans Day, we honor these flags' service with a solemn retirement ceremony.

This year's proceedings marked a stark contrast to the previous one, where cold, wet weather enveloped us in a blanket of snowflakes. Instead, we were blessed with a serene day, a brilliant blue sky, and comfortably mild temperatures. Around 50 dedicated volunteers, including Boy Scout Troop 622 from Johnstown, PA, and members of Unity Township American Legion Post 982, rallied together to assist in the flag removal.

In just over 30 minutes, these incredible volunteers efficiently and diligently sorted the flags into broken and unbroken piles. It's quite remarkable how much faster the flags come down compared to their installation! Following the removal, a respectful disposal by fire was conducted, a ceremonial act befitting the flags' honor.

To conclude this reverent occasion, Central City VFW Post 7457 rendered a 21-gun salute, followed by the beautiful notes of "Taps." The spirit of camaraderie prevailed as the group gathered at the nearby Shorty's Restaurant to share fellowship over wings and pizza.

This ceremony not only marked the end of a display but also served as a heartfelt tribute to the flags' significance and the collective dedication of our volunteers.

*Photos: Flag retirement*



## Curb Appeal

The Patriot Park Foundation remains dedicated to enhancing the Park's allure, aiming to capture the attention of the 300,000+ annual visitors who frequent the nearby Flight 93 National Memorial. Thanks to the generosity of Ritchey Brothers and Jason Svonavec, the Park proudly acquired a surplus desert camo Humvee, now a striking display at the Park's entrance.

Throughout the year, our diligent volunteers tirelessly worked to transform the Park's appearance. They diligently cleared brush and trimmed tree limbs, meticulously crafting an inviting view from Route 30. With over 1100 feet along the highway, this task was no small feat. However, their perseverance has brought us within 100 yards of



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*Away for the winter, thanks to Bob Hauger.*

## ***Curb Appeal*** *continued from previous page*

our envisioned goal. The visible improvements have already borne fruit, as more visitors now stop at the Park after catching sight of our flags.

In our pursuit of a more inviting entrance, the Foundation made the decision to remove an old, dilapidated building near the Park's entrance. This structure, no longer serving its purpose as dry storage due to the acquisition of a storage shed, was an eyesore beyond repair. Graciously, former occupant and Park benefactor Dave Schmucker stepped forward, generously funding the building's demolition. In its place, we plan to create an inviting entry adorned with decorative landscaping, offering a warm welcome to all Park visitors.

Additionally, our ambitions extend to enhancing accessibility. We are contemplating the paving of the entrance driveway, provided we secure adequate funding. These efforts collectively strive to create a more welcoming and accessible environment for all who visit Patriot Park.



*Clearing brush*



*Above, Demo underway*

*Left, President Musser presenting framed flag to donor Dave Schmucker.*

## ***Fund Drive***

As the year draws to a close, we're making a final concerted effort to achieve our fundraising target for 2023. We're tantalizingly close to reaching our goal, and it's all thanks to the incredible support we've received.

Our generous donors played a pivotal role in helping us surpass the \$25,000 matching fund challenge set by an anonymous donor. Their contributions made it possible for us to meet this significant milestone. And now, we're thrilled to announce another generous supporter, Marine veteran Rye Barcott, who has extended a \$5000 matching fund challenge.

This presents an incredible opportunity for you to amplify the impact of your donations. Every contribution made, up to \$5,000, during this matching challenge period will be doubled, effectively doubling the support for our cause. You'll find a donation form attached to this message. We kindly urge you to share these materials with anyone in your network who might be interested in

supporting the Patriot Park Foundation's vital work in honoring our GWOT fallen and veterans.

Your generosity is the lifeblood of Patriot Park. Your support enables us to continue our mission and make a tangible difference. Thank you in advance for your unwavering dedication and generous contributions, which fuel everything we do at Patriot Park.



*Stoystown American Legion Post #257 pushing us over the top for the \$25,000 matching fund challenge.*