

Mesquite Veterans Memorial Dedication Event
November 6, 2020

Hello. My name is Bruce Archer. I am the Mayor of the City of Mesquite. Thank you for joining us for this dedication event for the new Mesquite Veterans Memorial.

Due to the current pandemic, the City felt it was in the best interest of public health to host a small, brief event rather than a large community gathering. It gives us the opportunity to thank some of the key contributors and sponsors of this phenomenal achievement.

Although this is an invitation only event for safety reasons, we are broadcasting it live on Facebook. And we are producing a larger video to share with the community on Veterans Day. And as soon as it is safer for public gatherings, the City will host a community-wide event for everyone to celebrate this new memorial.

To begin our ceremonies, we will have an Invocation by Pastor Harry Sewell of Family Cathedral. The Invocation will be followed by the raising of the United States and POW flags by military veterans, Mr. Ralph Wadsworth and Mr. Thomas Latham. After the flags are raised, Mr. Karon Jackson will lead us in The Pledge of Allegiance, followed by his performance of the:

- The National Anthem, and
- God Bless America

Pastor Sewell, please begin our ceremonies.

Pastor Harry Sewell Remarks

Mayor Bruce Archer

Thank you for those presentations. Today is a historic day in Mesquite, Texas. While our primary purpose today is to dedicate this beautiful veteran's memorial, I do want to take just a few minutes to reflect on what veterans should mean to every American.

When Continental Soldiers fighting at places like Bunker Hill and Saratoga or suffering and freezing -sometimes to death at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War - our veterans were there.

When U.S. Sailors and Marines fought against pirates on the Barbary Coast and in Tripoli - our veterans were there.

Or when our soldiers endured terror and misery at Fort McHenry from British battleships or the hard fought victory under General Jackson at New Orleans during the War of 1812 - our veterans were there.

When Army soldiers fought bravely at Veracruz or when U.S. Marines crashed through the Walls of Montezuma during the War with Mexico - our veterans were there.

When Union soldiers fought on battlefields like Shiloh and Gettysburg during the Civil War - our veterans were there.

When U.S. Navy war ships full of American sailors fought gallantly against Spanish War Ships in Manilla Bay or Colonel Teddy Roosevelt leading our troops up San Juan Hill during the War with Spain - our veterans were there.

When our troops fought bravely at places like Belleau Wood or Cantigny during WWI - our veterans were there.

When Army paratroopers jumped into enemy lines on D-Day or Sailors who lost their lives on battleships in the Pacific during WWII - our veterans were there.

When General MacArthur led our troops into the famous battle of Inchon or when US Marines endured merciless cold weather for weeks at Chosin during the War in Korea - our veterans were there.

When our Air Force planes were shot down over North Vietnam or when Army Soldiers and Marines fought at places like Khe Sahn and Dak To during the Vietnam War - our veterans were there.

And for those Vietnam Veterans here today who did not enjoy the celebrations and parades you should have had when you came home - God bless you and THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR YOUR SERVICE AND SACRIFICE!

When our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines fought and lost their lives at places like Beirut, Grenada, Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan - our veterans were there.

Our United States Veterans have always been there - standing guard, protecting our freedom and too often, making the ultimate sacrifice in their faithful service.

May God bless all those who have served, those serving today and those who will serve in the future.

Today, we celebrate a 13-year journey.

- To build a memorial of honor for all military veterans – past and present.
- To have a place to pay tribute to all the families of military veterans for their sacrifices.
- And create a home for a lasting legacy to remember a sacrifice not forgotten for every military veteran who gave the ultimate.

And specifically, for those from the Mesquite community who lost their lives while in service to our country.

This could not have happened without the help of community contributions and the support of City Councils over the years - and I thank them all.

In 2018, the City Council had the vision to secure this beautiful piece of property for the project – I applaud them for making that decision. This memorial is the perfect addition to City Lake Park.

I also want to recognize former Mayor Stan Pickett. During his tenure, he helped lead a renewed level of energy to raise funds for this project by meeting with so many potential corporate sponsors. He was and continues to be a true ambassador for this memorial. Thank you, Mr. Pickett!

With a project of this size and scope, it takes leadership – and we have that in Cliff Keheley. From his days as the Director of Parks and Recreation to his role the past 5 years as our City Manager – it has been Cliff who has kept the City on a journey to the destination we arrive at today. Thank you, Cliff, for spearheading this memorial!

Cliff has assembled an awesome team of staff who helped build this memorial. I want to take this time to recognize our Director of Parks and Recreation, Elizabeth Harrell for her supervision of the project.

And I want to commend Park Project Manager, Robert Blankenship for his guidance of design and construction of this magnificent memorial!

As I said earlier, community contributions have always been at the center of the effort to build this project. From individual donations of \$100 dollars - to the \$100,000 dollars donated by Atmos Energy - we have been blessed to have tremendous financial support.

Of course, it started 13 years ago with the Heroes of Mesquite raising funds through various grassroots efforts.

On November 11, 2017 the City started an aggressive public education and fundraising campaign right here at City Lake Park. Our friends at Whataburger of Mesquite were the first to step up and donate. That was quickly followed by another friend of the City and hometown favorite - Mesquite BBQ who offered a portion of their sales to go towards construction. Local support was re-energized, powering our efforts forward.

The Mesquite Police Association and the Mesquite Firefighters Association both donated large amounts to continue the trend of that local support. Our community service organizations of Mesquite AMBUCS, Mesquite Rotary, and Mesquite Elks Club all called us to donate. MISD took the funds from their annual Veterans Day Breakfast and donated the money to this memorial. The Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Daughters of the American Revolution patriotically donated to the cause.

Our corporate partners began to take notice and eagerly lined up to ask “how can we help?”

- QuikTrip was “quick” and swift to donate.
- American National Bank of Texas located in downtown offered their help.
- Many large companies stepped forward:

- Elements International
- Dallas Regional Medical Center
- Hilltop Securities
- Centurion American
- Republic Services, and Oncor

Mr. Don Dykstra, the Chairman of Bloomfield Homes - one the largest homebuilders in Mesquite - came to the Mayor's office, sat down and said, "we are a part of this community and we want to be a part of this!" He took out his checkbook and wrote a \$25,000 check.

The list of donors is just too long to mention everyone – but these are some of the stories that illustrate the support it took to get us here.

Once construction started, we asked for donations of special features of the memorial to make it the best it could possibly be. Again, there was no hesitation:

- Several Mesquite High School Classes dating all the way back to 1964 sent in money to collectively buy 2 of the granite benches and all 6 history panels on the lakeside.
- Mr. Rick Lemmons bought the bench named "Freedom."
- Our own Mesquite Baseball Inc., bought the bench named "Service."

The interest in helping us buy the 6 military medallions was passionate:

- Mr. Bryan Goodwin bought the Army medallion.
- The Blankenship Family purchased the Air Force medallion.
- The Sewell Family said we will buy the Coast Guard medallion.
- Julie Greer Real Estate placed a "sold" sign on the Merchant Marine medallion.
- David Belt and the White Martial Trust donated funds for the Marine Corps medallion.
- And, the Keheley Family gave money to buy the Navy medallion.

Glen Thurman of Thurman & Norris Concrete bought the Memorial logo in the plaza.

Greg Noschese and his family donated to buy the Memorial logo that faces City Lake Park.

Mr. Kevin Patel of TEAM Fitch bought the Granite Star that sits in front of this plaza. And then Ms. Paula Salvaggio with PBS Construction said "we will install that Star as a sponsor!"

And Mr. Art Greenhaw and his family bought the majestic American Eagle that rests above this memorial.

I also want to mention how personally proud I was with the generous \$15,000 contribution to this memorial by our Congressman, the Honorable Lance Gooden – and a friend to Mesquite!

All of these donations and sponsors were critical to making the memorial happen. Thank-you!

There is one company who became a champion of this project very early on. As the title sponsor, Atmos Energy donated \$100,000 dollars to the memorial. Their donation catapulted the dream of a new memorial into a reality that we could do this! I would like to ask VP of Public Affairs at Atmos Energy, Mr. Oric Walker to make a presentation.

Oric Walker Presentation

Mayor Bruce Archer

Thank you Mr. Walker for those words and Atmos Energy for the extraordinary title sponsorship!

This memorial started 13 years ago with one man and his dream. Mr. Randy Lawson has been the leading advocate and activist for this memorial. As a member of the Heroes of Mesquite, his passion and dedication to this memorial has been unwavering. Over the past 13 years, I have been humbled by his relentless efforts to build this project. Please join in welcoming Mr. Randy Lawson.

Randy Lawson

Mayor Bruce Archer

Thank you, Randy. As he makes his way back let's give him one more round of applause.

As I mentioned earlier, this memorial will be a place to honor all those from our community who lost their life during active duty service. Each of them left behind families and friends. Many of them left behind mothers.

Gold Star Mother, Mary Border was the first person to speak about the need for this memorial when we started the renewed fundraising efforts in 2017. We thought it only appropriate for her to return to speak again at the dedication and then assist me in laying a wreath beneath the names of those from Mesquite who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Representing all Gold Star Mothers of our community, please help me welcome Ms. Mary Border.

Mary Border

Mayor Bruce Archer

Thank you Mary for those inspirational words.

Now it is time to read the names of those from Mesquite who gave the ultimate sacrifice while serving and protecting this great country. The presentation will be conducted by Mr. David Melton followed by Sam McCright playing Taps.

If you are able, please stand for the reading of the names - and remove your hat. Mr. Melton, the podium is your sir.

Mayor Bruce Archer

You may be seated.

Thank you Mr. Melton and Mr. McCright [mac-crite].

To conclude our ceremonies we will have an official ribbon cutting. Before we do that, just a few special instructions:

- After the ribbon is cut, please remain seated.
- We will lead everyone through the memorial in groups of 10.
- Please be mindful of your time enjoying the memorial, so that we can get everyone through in an efficient and safe manner.
- Please keep your face covering on and maintain social distancing.
- The memorial will be open later today for longer visits.

Thank you again for attending.

For the ribbon cutting ceremony, I ask the following attendees to please join me now:

- **Mr. Randy Lawson**, Heroes of Mesquite, representing the community.
- **Ms. Mary Border**, representing all military families
- **Mr. Angel Rivera**, military veteran, representing all current and past military veterans
- **Mr. Oric Walker**, Atmos Energy, representing all donors and sponsor.