

Erlewein Mortuary's Avenue of Flags

Supporting our local veterans' organizations is very important to us at Erlewein Mortuary. Therefore, in the Fall of 2009, we decided to find a way to publicly acknowledge and honor our veterans while evoking a sense of patriotism in others within our community.

Our main facility is located on a heavily-traveled highway with 20,000+ cars passing by each day. After thinking through many ideas, we finally determined the best way to acknowledge and honor our veterans was to create an Avenue of Flags along the front of our building which parallels the highway. By doing this, we believed many people would see the flag display every day and remember our veterans who sacrificed so much for our freedom. Such a display, we hoped, would also evoke the sense of patriotism we desired in all who passed.

We began our project by contacting a local veterans' organization who had installed flags at a nearby cemetery in the past. Two gentlemen in the organization were excited to take on the project, so work began immediately to determine the number of flags needed, the size of the flags, the height of the flag poles, and the placement of the flags.

The gentlemen purchased all the supplies needed on our behalf and provided the labor for the installation of the flags. First, we marked the grass with spray paint where each flag would be located, keeping them an appropriate distance from the highway for both safety and aesthetics. Next, they dug holes with a posthole digger and inserted PVC pipes into the ground where the flag poles would stand when they were being displayed. The pipes were then surrounded with concrete for strength and fitted with a small cover to be placed over their tops when the flags were not in use. This would keep grass and dirt from filling the pipe. Finally, they assembled the flags and fittings on the poles.

Our Avenue of Flags is in a straight line parallel to the highway and is made up of 22 flags. We currently display the flags the week before and during Memorial Day, the week before and during Independence Day, and the week before and during Veterans' Day. We enjoy having the flags displayed so much that we are considering displaying them for more holidays, such as Armed Forces Day and Flag Day.

At the request of our local veterans' organization, we displayed our Avenue of Flags in May 2010 for a very special event. They had been working for two years to develop the Hancock County Veterans Park, a large park in the center of our county to honor all veterans. With our building being located on such a major corridor into the county, our Avenue of Flags welcomed guests from outside of the county to the dedication ceremony for the park. In July 2010, our local Disabled American Veterans organization asked us to display our flags for an extended time after Independence Day, as they had organized a ride for disabled veterans. They felt our display was such a

wonderful way to honor our veterans that they wanted them to ride by it and witness our community's gratitude to them and all who served first-hand.

The flags are easy to display. We simply remove the covers from the PVC pipes; remove the flags from the protective sleeves in which we place them; unroll the flags; and insert the poles into the pipes. They are just as easy to take down. We remove the flag poles from the pipes; roll the flags around the flag pole; insert them into the protective sleeves; and place the cover on the PVC pipes. With the PVC pipes being covered, there is virtually no maintenance. The pipes were inserted into the ground far enough that we can mow right over the top of them without damaging the pipe or the covers.

The expense to our mortuary for creating the Avenue of Flags was mainly for materials, as the gentlemen who installed the display would not accept payment for their labor. However, they graciously accepted a donation to their organization.

Since the installation of our Avenue of Flags, we have had countless positive phone calls each time the flags are displayed. The callers have thanked us for honoring our veterans, told us how much they appreciate the display, and commented on how beautiful and patriotic the display is. We have also had people stop their cars along the roadside and take pictures of the flags.

The Avenue of Flags brings a sense of patriotism to both our community and our entire staff. We are all very proud to see the red, white, and blue flying in a beautiful display outside our very own facility. It helps remind us that we live in a wonderful country with freedoms of which others may only dream.