Operation: Moving Honors 2022

Document Intent: Background, context, scope, talking points
(For further detail please refer to each organizations’ media contact)

Background

Organized in 1928 by Julian Stanley Wise, the Roanoke Lifesaving and First Aid Crew (Virginia) was the first independent, all-volunteer rescue squad in the United States. It is fitting that it was in Roanoke, 30 years ago, that Kevin Dillard founded the National EMS Memorial Service to honor and recognize EMS and air medical providers who died in the line of duty. Kevin realized that while there were memorial services for police and fire professionals, there was no formal recognition of EMS individuals who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service to others. Each year, volunteers build additional sections to add to the temporary memorial, called the Tree of Life, and the names of new honorees are added. At the end of each annual Service, the panels are packed away into storage until the next year.

In 2000, the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride was formed when 10 EMS providers rode their bikes from Boston to the National EMS Memorial Service in Roanoke to raise awareness about the commitment, service, and sacrifice of EMS providers. Today the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride continues to honor EMS personnel by organizing and implementing long distance cycling events that memorialize and celebrate the lives of those who serve every day, those who have become sick or injured while performing their duties and those who have died in the line of duty.

There is no permanent national memorial that recognizes EMS Providers. In 2008 the National EMS Memorial Foundation was formed to change that. In 2018, after a decade of their work, Public Law 115-275 was signed by the President of the United States which exclusively authorizes the National EMS Memorial Foundation to establish a permanent National EMS Memorial in Washington, D.C. to honor, recognize and commemorate: The commitment, service and sacrifice of EMS providers killed, injured or disabled in the line of duty and for all those that have served, currently serve and will continue to serve. They are currently in the Federal approval process to finalize the memorial site and development will then quickly follow.

While all 3 organization’s missions continue individually, they also recognize deep synergies. Since 2015 the National EMS Memorial Service and Weekend of Honor have been held annually in the D.C. area, which organically highlights the work of each of the three organizations and common ground. The National EMS Memorial Service and the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride host the Weekend of Honor and the National EMS Memorial Foundation attends as they continue their tireless work to build a permanent National EMS Memorial in DC.
In 2020, like most in-person gatherings, the National EMS Weekend of Honor, National EMS Memorial Service, and National EMS Memorial Bike Rides were cancelled due to COVID. While valent efforts and virtual events helped to fill the void, the lack of gathering to honor their own was surely palpable within EMS. There were several key takeaways from this used in future plannings.

Revelations

Many in the public and in EMS for that matter are unaware of the Weekend of Honor and of the organizers mission. Many have never seen the National EMS Memorial Service, the Tree of Life or ridden in the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride but aspire to.

Those in EMS have certainly risen to the occasion as we faced a global pandemic. Having spent more than 2 years on the frontlines, there is deep respect and clear recognition that EMS providers are weary, yet the work continues.

The pandemic has birthed a burgeoning national awareness of first responders and the never-ending work they do along with a growing understanding of their sacrifices.

The host organizations are 100% led by volunteers and the Weekend of Honor requires hundreds of volunteers, nearly all of whom are active EMS providers in their communities. They, along with families, friends, and colleagues, could not come together in 2020 to grieve and honor the fallen which made the impact of the pandemic more difficult. Having no permanent memorial to visit at another time further complicated this. Organizers also recognized that many families of honorees and volunteers are still unable or unwilling to travel or must remain to work in their communities as staffing gaps continue.

Moving Honors

The past 2 years’ Tree of Life installments were built by Tom and Jenn Liebman at their home near Dallas, TX. As thoughts swirled how to transport this “precious cargo” to D.C. for the Weekend of Honor last year, ideas and dreams turned into a plan when the Weekend of Honor’s legacy sponsor Global Medical Response stepped in with a donated ambulance and staffing for the trek across multiple states. The event was so successful, organizers are repeating it again this year with an expanded footprint.

Respectfully dubbed **Moving Honors**, the procession will make its way from near Dallas, TX to Arlington, VA over 10 days. The Tree of Life will be housed inside this specially decorated ambulance and not removed until it is officially unveiled at the start of the Weekend of Honor. A Tree of Life replica will be available for viewing at stops along the way. The journey fittingly begins at the Global Medical Response’s headquarters in Lewisville, TX on Monday, July 11.

The goal of the Moving Honors procession is three-fold. First, is to bring awareness and additional recognition to the honorees. Second, is to provide broader access to the Tree of Life to allow anyone to pay respects forward to the honoree families and EMS colleagues at the other end of its journey. And finally in a much smaller capacity, it is an opportunity for fundraising to support the National EMS Memorial Service, allowing it to continue to recognize fallen EMS and air medical individuals. A limited-edition challenge coin has been minted and will be sold at stops along the route.
The ambulance will make various stops along the way. Please see the planned route map and accompanying documents as we develop stop details. Leaders with the American Ambulance Association are supporting the ceremonial procession and assisting with notification of EMS agencies in and nearby the planned route. Various tributes are continuing to develop, including roadside salutes, decorated overpasses, and brief ceremonies at hosted sites. Additional industry organizations that are assisting or will attend the National EMS Memorial Service and Weekend of Honor this year include: the Association of Air Medical Services, the National EMS Management Association, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Office of EMS, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians.

At every stop along the route there will be opportunities to learn more about and pay respects to the honorees, learn more about the organizations dedicated to honoring EMS providers, see and photograph the visual representation of the Tree of Life and to purchase limited-edition challenge coins. The Moving Honors will end its journey when it arrives in Arlington, VA on July 22, led by the National EMS Memorial Bike Ride, officially kicking off the Weekend of Honor.

Details continue to be developed...

About National EMS Memorial Bike Ride

Their mission is to honor EMS personnel by organizing and implementing long distance cycling events that memorialize and celebrate the lives of those who serve every day, those who have become sick or injured while performing their duties, and those who have died in the line of duty. Visit us at www.NEMSMBR.org.

About National EMS Memorial Foundation

Their mission is to build the National EMS Memorial in Washington, D.C. that will commemorate the ongoing commitment, service and sacrifice of the Nation’s Emergency Medical Services providers killed, injured, or disabled in the line of duty and for all those that continue to serve. Visit us at www.emsmemorial.org.

About National EMS Memorial Service

Their mission is to honor those in EMS from air and ground who have made the ultimate sacrifice having died in the line of duty and it is the organization congressionally sanctioned to conduct the annual service. Visit us at www.national-ems-memorial.org.