

THE WEEKLY VISTA
BELLA VISTA, ARKANSAS
A veteran's final benefit could disappear forever
Cemetery space becoming more scarce

By Douglas Grant
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BELLA VISTA — A person who serves America honorably in any of its military services is entitled to a number of benefits, including help buying a home, health care and educational assistance.

But there is one benefit many veterans know little or nothing about, what might be called their final one - that of a free burial in a national cemetery.

One such facility exists just south of here in Fayetteville.

It began as a cemetery for re-internment of soldiers who fought and died during the Civil War. Today, it is one of 120 such facilities nationwide serving the needs of our veterans and their spouses.

Aside from offering a final restingplace for America's servicemen and women, these cemeteries have one other significant thing in common - they are running out of space.

If nothing changes, the cemetery in Fayetteville will close its doors to additional burials sometime in 2023, said Harold Crivello, treasurer of the Regional National Cemetery Improvement Corp., a group whose purpose is to secure more land for the future.

Since its incorporation in 1984, the group has increased the cemetery's size by more than 120 percent, but that's not enough, Crivello said.

"We bury between 150 and 200 veterans every year," he said, adding that most are people who served in World War II. "Andnow we're seeing more from Korea and Vietnam."

Crivello said there is room to grow at the Fayetteville cemetery, but there is one thing holding everything else up.

"We just don't have the money," he said of the organization.

There are at least 17 lots on the north and west sides of the cemetery, all approximately 50 feet by 150 feet. The most recent assessments, done in 2007, show the individual properties worth between \$9,000 and \$200,000.

Crivello said that to buy them outright would cost RNCIC approximately \$1.8 million. The group has just over \$13,000 in its treasury.

Even though this is a national cemetery, Crivello said the federal government "washes its hands" of the

operation once the facility is built and open.

Crivello said his organization relies primarily on grants and private donations for land purchases, both of which have been down of late. The group received one grant of \$5,000 in 2008, he said.

As the money becomes available, RNCIC will buy more land.

“But we have to wait until we get a bit more cash,” Crivello said. He noted that the group wants to have some money left over in the event of an emergency.

Crivello is hoping RNCIC’s plight will reach any number of the estimated 100,000 veterans and their families in northwest Arkansas.

“We’re hoping to get veterans helping veterans to keep the cemetery open. If each of them just gave \$10, we’d soon have nearly enough.”

RNCIC is a not-forprofit 501(c)3 organization. All donations are tax-deductible. Contributions should be sent to RNCIC, P.O. Box 4221, Fayetteville. (More info at <http://RNCIC.com>)



Submitted

Harold Crivello, commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Bella Vista Chapter 678, right, presents a \$2,000 check on behalf of the organization to Roger McClan, president of the Regional National Cemetery Improvement Association.

INSERT

Fayetteville National Cemetery

Fayetteville National Cemetery Opened in 1867 for reinterment of Civil War dead

One of 120 nationwide, in 37 states and Puerto Rico.

Of those, 38 are no longer open for burials, while 22 others are open for cremations and second interments (spouses) only.

14.1 acres

Number of interments through fiscal 2008: 7,785

Placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 28, 1999, and later added to the Civil War Discovery Trail.

Notables buried at the cemetery: Medal of Honor recipient, Pfc. Clarence B. Craft, World War II, U.S. Army, Company G, 382nd Infantry, 96th Infantry Division - Hen Hill, Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, May 31, 1945 (Section 17, Grave 120); and James C. Putnam, an original founder of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the first national president of the VFW.

Web site: www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/fayetteville.asp

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Web site: www.VA.gov