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NDVA Receives VA Grant for Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Grand Island, Groundbreaking Nov. 10

GRAND ISLAND, NEB. — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has awarded the Nebraska Department of Veterans’ Affairs (NDVA) nearly $8.4 million for the establishment of the Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Grand Island. The cemetery will be built off the Soldiers & Sailors Cemetery, which was part of the Grand Island Veterans’ Home and will be incorporated into the state veterans cemetery design. Design work is being completed by CMBA Architects and construction will be done by Sampson Construction.

“It’s extremely important for the state of Nebraska to serve our veterans and their families, including providing a sacred resting place for them,” said Governor Jim Pillen. “I want to congratulate the team at NDVA as well as the people of central Nebraska for moving this project forward to ensure there are options for every community in the state to honor and remember our fallen heroes.”

A grant pre-application for the project was initially submitted to NCA in August 2021. Community fundraising efforts brought in over $750,000 to meet the grant’s 10% match requirement, in a matter of months. While NDVA’s application ranked first in the nation for state veterans cemetery establishment grants, only cemetery expansion projects were funded in that year.

During the 2023 legislative session, Senator Ray Aguilar of District 35 introduced a bill to allocate funds to the state veterans cemetery using state funds, which was passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Pillen. Then, in the spring of 2023, NDVA was informed by NCA there was an opportunity to receive federal grant funding, if the full project could be submitted by August 15. NDVA successfully fulfilled all NCA’s requirements and was notified on September 28, 2023, it will be receiving grant funding.

“We would not be celebrating this victory without the work of countless Nebraskans, all of whom are dedicated to honoring and serving our state’s veterans,” said NDVA Director John Hilgert. “I want to thank the many people in Grand Island, Hall County, and central Nebraska who have helped make this a reality, as well as the hard-working public servants at NDVA and our state government as well as our federal partners in the NCA who have worked tirelessly to meet the grant deadlines. This has truly been a team lift and nothing short of incredible to get to where we are today.”

A groundbreaking ceremony will be held on Friday, November 10, at 11:00 a.m. at the future site of the cemetery near the corner of Webb Road and Capital Avenue in Grand Island. The ceremony will be emceed by Hall County Veterans Service Officer Don Shuda, and speakers include U.S. Senator Pete Ricketts, Lieutenant Governor Joe Kelly, Grand Island Mayor Roger Steele, NDVA Director Hilgert, and Hall County Board Member Pamela Lancaster.

“November 10th will be a special day for our entire community as it starts a new chapter in honoring Nebraska veterans and their families,” said Shuda. “Hall County and Grand Island have a long history of serving veterans. We’re excited to break ground on this cemetery and create something very special for the people of Nebraska.”

At the event, the presentation of colors will be done by the United Veterans’ Color Guard. The National Anthem will be performed by the Northwest High School Band, and an invocation will be given by Dan Naranjo. Following the groundbreaking there will be a patriotic song performed by Trenna Edwards and a firing salute. The ceremony will end with the playing of “Taps” and the United Veterans’ Color Guard will retire the colors. After the ceremony, lunch will be served at the United Veterans Club at 1914 West Capital Ave.

Nebraska currently has one state veterans’ cemetery in Alliance that is run by NDVA. It also has two national cemeteries – the Omaha National Cemetery and the Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Maxwell. Both are operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For more information on the Nebraska Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the services it offers, visit [veterans.nebraska.gov](https://veterans.nebraska.gov).

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