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Eagle Scout Returns to Sponsor MIA Cenotaph

By Evelyn Candor@publius.publications.com 10:43 a.m. February 5, 2017

NEW JERSEY – When the All Veterans Memorial Board of Directors aimed to expand the Presidential Preamble Stage and construct a 60’ barrier wall, they knew their proposal would directly affect a portion of Eric Wood’s Eagle Scout Community Project. After consideration, the group agreed that in order to move the proposal forward they needed Wood’s blessings. Like all Eagle Scout candidates, they are required to plan, develop and execute a service project helpful to any school, community or religious institution.

Wood earned his prestigious rank in February of 2008 by planting 21 Norwegian Spruces to act as a sound barrier between the sports complex and the memorial ground, and providing and installing an American Flag Pole and flag retirement vault. Wood’s community service project was considered the ground breaking of the AVM, which was completed on May 25, 2007. However, the necessity to relocate the vault brought Wood back into the fold more than ten years later. “I have always been supportive of the AVM and completely understand why they need to make changes. I really appreciate them for asking”, Wood said.

Wood, a 2010 graduate from Mt. Olive High School attended Florida State University earning a dual degree in Accounting and Marketing. Wood continued his education by achieving a Masters in Accounting and passing the CPA examines. He is currently working as an associate for RSM US, formally McGladrey in Jacksonville, Florida.

It was not until the AVM board members learned that the Turkey Brook Park Fire Pit had been designated as a commemorative gathering point and flag retirement ground for the local scouting organizations, that they decided to ‘repurpose’ Wood’s flag retirement vault into a national MIA CENOTAPH. A cenotaph is an empty tomb or a monument erected in honor of a person or group of people whose remains are elsewhere. Many, and specifically in this case, the MIA CENOTAPH will be dedicated to the countless missing U.S. warriors that never returned home from battle. The monument will be dedicated to all branches of service and all conflicts, battles and wars. “The moment I was told how the vault would be used, I offered to fund the project”, Wood added. “It is the least I could do”.

While there are notably only a handful of cenotaphs in the United States, they are all dedicated to specific persons or groups. Citing a few examples, the cenotaph at Yale University honors the men of Yale, the Battle Monument in Baltimore, Maryland commemorates the Battle of Baltimore, the San Antonio, Texas cenotaph is dedicated to the defenders of the Battle of the Alamo, while Virginia Tech’s cenotaph honors all Virginia Tech cadets. The John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial in Dallas is often described as a cenotaph; however, it has not been formally designated as such. Thus far, the AVM’s MIA CENOTAPH will be the first in our nation to be all encompassing. “It is an honor to be able to be a part of the first and final phase of the All Veterans Memorial. I look forward to its completion”, Wood said.

A two layered foundation and the relocation of the vault was completed in November. The concrete for both layers was donated by Sparta Redi-Mix Concrete, a division of Diamond Sand and Gravel. Books of authority, representing the many faiths of our servicemen and women will be ceremoniously placed into the vault and permanently sealed. Replicas of period relics and trim will be added as the finishing touch. The cenotaph will be unveiled and dedicated on May 25, 2017 at the AVM’s ten year anniversary event.