



Hello everyone, I'm Steve Real, the President of the Regional National Cemetery Improvement Corp, commonly called the RNCIC. We are not well known so I'm here to tell you about our unusual organization, reportedly the only one of its kind in the United States.

Our mission is simple: We raise money to buy land to donate to the Fayetteville National Cemetery so that it does not fill up and close for future interments.

When the Cemetery was in danger in 1984 of being closed to new burials due to lack of space, Ken Gibson, Larry L. Browne, Jr., and John William (Bill) Murphy formed the Regional National Cemetery Improvement Corporation (RNCIC) under the Arkansas Non-Profit Corporation Act. It allowed donors to give tax-deductible gifts in whatever form. The petition was made and approved May 7, 1984. The Arkansas Secretary of State, Paul Riviere, approved our incorporation on Oct 19, 1984.

Although the corporation's name, Regional National Cemetery Improvement Corporation, may seem unusual, it is derived from the National Cemeteries Act of 1973 (PL 93-43) wherein the VA was authorized by Congress to acquire land and to construct regional national cemeteries in each of 10 Standard Federal Regions. It did not, however, authorize funds to enlarge existing national cemeteries, except through donations of land. The Mission of the newly formed RNCIC was and is to raise money and gifts of property to enlarge the Fayetteville National Cemetery in order to keep it open to new burials for the foreseeable future.

In October 1984, aware of the dire situation at the Fayetteville National Cemetery, the RNCIC started a fund drive. Then Governor Bill Clinton was the primary speaker at an open meeting at the Fayetteville Hilton Hotel, during which information was presented on the status of the Cemetery, a proposed expansion area, and the status of preliminary

negotiations for the acquisition of land. Governor Clinton made one of the first donations to the RNCIC.

It took five years to raise enough money to make the first land donation to the VA. The dedication ceremony was held August 1, 1989, with approximately 1 acre of land (3 tracts containing approximately 41,000 sq. ft.). The Cemetery, in desperate straits, started burials on the land before the transfer paperwork was completed.

Our next donation was August 15, 1991 when we deeded 8 lots, 2.807 acres, to the Fayetteville National Cemetery. The RNCIC donated 5 more lots from 1995 until 1999.

Almost a decade had passed since the land donation to the VA in May 1999 until 4 lots containing 1.35 acres were donated in October 2008, with special acknowledgment given to Milo Cumpston, who was a driving force in acquiring the properties. This donation included the first property to expand the Cemetery through to South Hill Avenue. Milo was said to be the backbone of support for the expansion of the Fayetteville National Cemetery. Milo was a charter member and Board Vice President of the RNCIC and active until his death in April 2009.

With the donation of the 1.35 acres to the VA in October 2008, the burial capacity of the Fayetteville National Cemetery was increased by nearly 1,300 sites. A lot of the people who had started the RNCIC's mission had now passed away and many are buried at the FNC.

In early 2009 Wes Stites and Josh Sakon, professors at the University of Arkansas joined our Board. Josh was a runner and introduced the idea of doing a 5K Race as a fund raiser. Josh and Wes coordinated running the race and Peggy McClain led in gathering sponsors for it. The name for the first 5K Race was "Veterans Memorial 5K Run" and the date was set for November 7, 2009. The race continued annually as a major fund raiser through sponsorships from Northwest Arkansas businesses and individuals until the COVID pandemic of 2019 cancelled it.

On May 28, 2010 local businessman and philanthropist Don Tyson donated \$75,000 to the RNCIC to buy land. Long time RNCIC Board members Peggy and Roger McClain were instrumental in getting the donation.

On Saturday morning, November 9, 2013, following the fifth annual 5K Race, the RNCIC donated 2.3 acres of land (6 lots) to the VA. A large crowd gathered at the gates of the Fayetteville National Cemetery for this ceremony. This was the donation which really

created the ability of the Fayetteville National Cemetery to expand west to South Hill Avenue and to join up with the one lot on South Hill Avenue previously donated in 2008.

By the end of 2014, the RNCIC's 30th year, the group had purchased 30 properties with ten properties adjacent to the cemetery remaining on the current RNCIC brochure map. Those 30 properties purchased translate into roughly 13 acres adjoining the Cemetery at a cost of approximately \$846,000. Without the long-term, continued efforts of the members of the RNCIC, this expansion project would not be possible, and the Fayetteville National Cemetery would have been closed to new burials back in the 1980s. Nearly every burial in the cemetery since 1989 has been on land donated by the RNCIC

A public ceremony was held on July 3, 2017 in observance of the RNCIC's 2.4 acres presented to the VA, and also the 150th anniversary of the FNC. This land was to the north of the cemetery abutting the hiking trail and the University of Arkansas library building complex.

Our closing on our latest property purchase, 920 South Hill Avenue (our lot #13), took place on August 2, 2019. Arnold and Margaret Christie (both deceased) wanted their property to be sold for the Fayetteville National Cemetery, and the heirs of their estate acknowledged and fulfilled their request. It took almost two years to get the buildings and underground utilities cleared for donation.

By July 2021 the FNC Director had submitted the RNCIC's letter to offer this property to the VA in Washington D.C. Paperwork and 'due diligence' are awaiting completion for the transfer to be final. The COVID 19 pandemic has slowed things considerably.

As of Aug 2021, there were about 11,545 burials in the Cemetery according to FindAGrave.com. We are proud of our heritage of keeping the Fayetteville National Cemetery open for burials the last 40 years and look forward to doing the same in the future.

For more information about the RNCIC, please visit our website at [RNCIC.org](http://RNCIC.org). We also have a Facebook page. Thank you.

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*<This speech was written by Jake LAMKINS at the request of Jannie Layne who was coordinating the December 14, 2024 ceremony at the Fayetteville National Cemetery to place wreaths at all the gravesites.>*