

Veterans Cemetery Foundation Proposes A Wind Break Success

At last count, 272 families have received free burial services at Nebraska's state veteran cemetery, in Alliance, since it opened in January 2011. Often, attendees to the enhanced military memorial ceremonies will think, say, or hear "I have never seen anyone receive this much honor." Unfortunately, for too many, the honor is overshadowed by the western Nebraska weather. The facility lacks an enclosed shelter for winter services. It is difficult to notice much more than the brutal cold wind on days the temperature is below freezing and the wind-chill below zero. In the spring and summer, the solemn open-air committal shelter achieves its purpose of providing shade, a nice cool breeze, and view of the endless horizon. That is of no comfort for the fragile widow scheduling an interment in February.

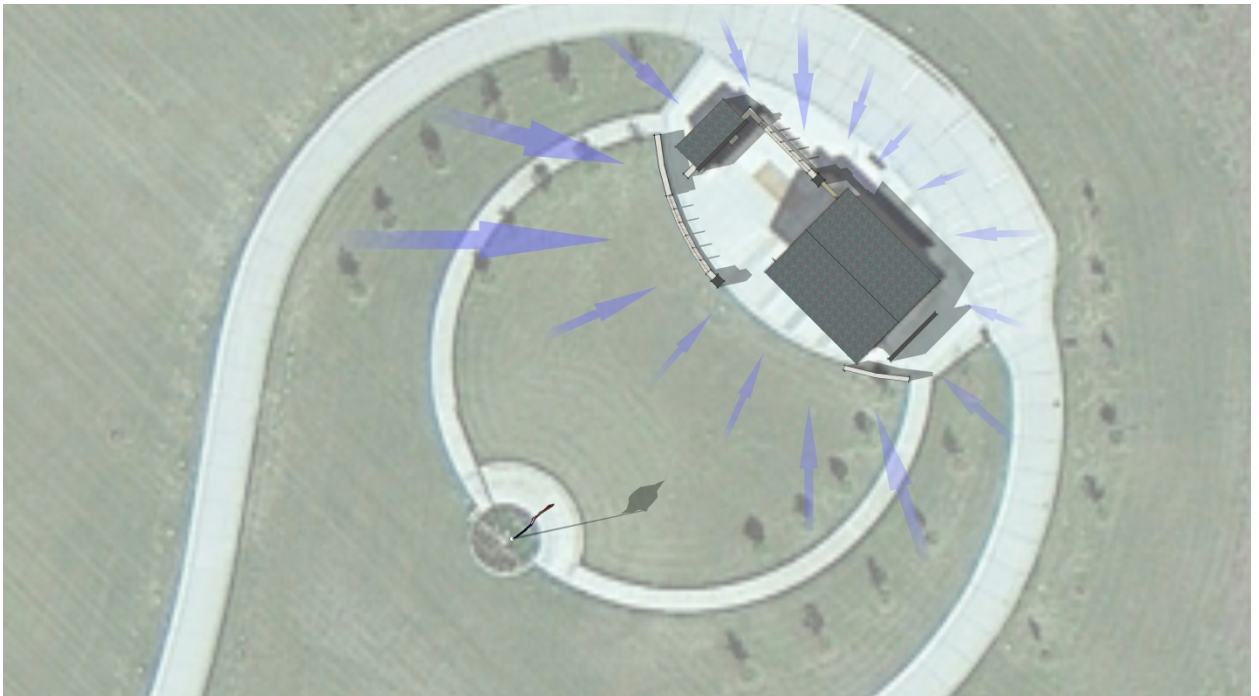
Many have asked why the state doesn't build a chapel at the state veteran cemetery. Administrator Allen Pannell explains that veteran cemetery memorials are coordinated to be similar in length as traditional cemetery graveside services. He adds, "The Department of Veterans' Affairs would overstep its mission if it tried to replace houses-of-worship and funeral homes. Intentionally, the bulk of cemetery resources are designated for the upkeep of our heroes' final resting places. The labor needed to maintain a chapel would substantially diminish our ability to groom the burial fields and attend to our broader mission of being immediately available to assist every visitor." In 2012, the Alliance Lions Club donated six patio heaters to help with the situation. Unfortunately, high winds often blew the heaters out within minutes of being lit. Eventually, cemetery employees reverted to lap blankets donated by members of The Daughters of the American Revolution and a local Girl Scout.

Thankfully, the state veterans cemetery was developed to be community-centered so that it could evolve to meet needs not evident before construction. Meaning, there is a solution. The Veterans State Cemetery at Alliance Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit, has worked diligently since 2010 to provide resources above that which are available through state funding. Over the last 7 years, foundation board directors, from throughout western Nebraska, have secured funds to help with several cemetery additions, programs, and advertisement. Through a partnership with Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs and the State Building Division, they have committed to raising monies needed to build a wind break, at the committal shelter, that will be effective and aesthetically pleasing, with minimal perpetual maintenance costs.

Schemmer Associates, the architecture and engineering firm involved with the construction of the cemetery, used historical winter wind-speed data to create a design that was approved at the Foundation's last quarterly board meeting. To date, \$14,000.00 has been raised toward the total construction costs estimate of \$113,861.00. It is anticipated that another \$14,000.00 will be raised at the second annual Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament, scheduled for Saturday May 26, 2018, at Skyview Golf Course in Alliance. Foundation President Ron Winchell, a retired Colonel, stated "If the annual golf tournaments continue to be successful, we can start construction in 8 years. Perhaps, there are grants or other resources that could help us reduce that time frame. We are in search mode right now to find a way to make this happen a lot sooner." Donations for the wind break project can be made on the Foundation's website at www.vscaf.org. Checks can be mailed to Veterans State Cemetery at Alliance Foundation, P.O. Box 902, Alliance, NE 69301. For more information contact Ron Winchell at 308-631-8787 or Donation Chairman Dr. D.N. "Cork" Taylor Jr., at 308-760-1523.



The committal shelter, outfitted with seating and a sound system during ceremonies, provides a solemn beautiful setting in the warm months.



Winter Wind Speed, Direction, and Frequency.



Using matching stone, acrylic panels, and steel supports, the wind break will allow the shelter to maintain an open-air and endless horizon experience that protects the immediate family, while allowing plenty of space for extended family members and friends.