



Honoring Veterans in a Unique Way

By Cierra Orlyk

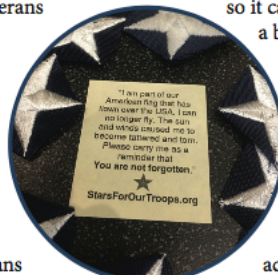
Susan Wells' life changed the day she was introduced to a project her friend was working on. Her friend explained how they took the embroidered stars from old 3' x 5' American flags and sent them to our military and veterans with a message. Wells was captivated by the idea. In September 2010, she requested to share these with a group of World War II veterans traveling to Washington D.C. to see the monuments that honor them. She was overwhelmed with support from the Vietnam veterans who escorted the World War II veterans to the airport. The veterans lined up asking how to get one for themselves or their friends.

Inspired by the positive feedback, Wells created **Stars for Our Troops Inc.** The Troy-based non-profit takes tattered American flags and retires the stripes with dignity, then repurposes the embroidered Stars, sending each Star along with a message on a little note to veterans or those who are currently serving. Anyone can request a bag of 50 Stars with a personalized card to be sent to their loved one.

The impact that the Star organization has made across the country and world is clear upon scrolling through dozens of positive appraisals on the non-profit's website. "It is hard being a single soldier hundreds of miles from any family or friends besides the ones I've made in the military. I was given a star from my mother before I deployed to Korea and there has not been a day [since] it was given to me that I have not carried it on me," writes a young man serving our country on Stars for Our Troops' online guest book. No two Stars sent out are the same, as they are hand-cut one-by-one by local volunteers.

The Troy non-profit prides itself upon its local volunteers that dedicate their time to preparing the Stars for delivery. Every month, they come together and cut Stars from the washed cantons of faded, retired flags and package them in a pouch with the message: "I am part of our American flag that has flown over the USA. I can no longer fly. The sun and winds caused me to become tattered and torn. Please carry me as a reminder that you are not forgotten." They then send the pouches out to people who have ordered them via the organization's website.

The size of the flag and the embroidered Stars are important. The Star must fit into a 2" x 3" pouch, and it must be embroidered so it can be felt without needing to look at it. Susan stopped a blind soldier one day and said she had something special for him, asking him to put out his hand. He did, and she placed the pouched Star in it. He felt it, smiled and said, "That is a star from our Flag." The blind man was right. He was honored to receive it.



The motto of Stars for Our Troops Inc. is simple: "Thanking those that served and are serving." The organization not only sends Stars to veterans and active military personnel, but to first responders as well. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Stars for Our Troops sent stars to medical staff on the frontlines. The simply-packaged Star and message is a small gesture that packs deep meaning. It lets those who receive a Star know that they are not forgotten. In the words of a veteran written on Stars for Our Troops online guest book, it is "a little piece of what we all stand for and [our] reason for being a soldier."

Sometimes, the smallest gestures can be the most powerful. Want to support Stars for Our Troops Inc.'s mission? Follow them on Facebook (@StarsforourTroops) to learn about upcoming events. Visit their website to find other ways to get involved at www.starsforourtroops.org.

Razzano Law, PLLC
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Estate Planning & Administration
Offices in Albany & Clifton Park

518.478.8956 | Info@RazzanoLaw.com **Brittany Belmonte Razzano, Esq.**