Patriot Plaza at Sarasota National Cemetery

Year Nine Activities: January 2023 – December 2023

Patriot Plaza, donated by The Patterson Foundation as a gift to the nation’s veterans, their families, and communities, has for the ninth year proved to be a community treasure for patriotism.

Patriot Plaza 2023

The partnership between The Patterson Foundation and the National Cemetery Administration remains strong after nine years since the dedication and gifting of Patriot Plaza to the community and the nation. The Sarasota National Cemetery (SNC) Director and staff continue to care for the outdoor amphitheater as part of their meticulous and careful stewardship of our regional national cemetery. Through an endowment managed by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Patterson Foundation continues to fund capital maintenance needs at the amphitheater that range from replacing glass panels in the roof to keeping the artwork clean and maintained. The Patterson Foundation also has prioritized the need to ensure our community and beyond are aware of the amphitheater and provide ways to ensure an enhanced experience when touring the amphitheater either in person or through the online virtual tour. The Patriot Plaza Guide program has been continuing since Patriot Plaza opened in 2014. SNC volunteers that have an interest in providing tours of Patriot Plaza receive additional training on the art and architecture of Patriot Plaza and how to provide tours to adults and children. School tours of the amphitheater are provided to grades 4-12 and The Patterson Foundation provides funding for the transportation of school tours to school systems from four counties in our region, which include Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto Counties. Since the community dedication in June 2014, the Patriot Plaza Guides have supported over 51 events and given over 705 tours with 390 public tours, 139 private tours and 176 school tours. As of December 2023, over 74,539 people have attended events and tours at Patriot Plaza.
Activities and Events at Patriot Plaza

Throughout 2023 various activities took place at Patriot Plaza. The SNC Director and staff host various programs to commemorate specific holidays throughout the year with support from organizations such as the SNC Advisory Committee for the Memorial Day Remembrance program or the Diocese of Venice for the Veterans Day Mass. Highlights of the different events and activities are shown below:

Annual Heroes' Tour: Since 2016 the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay has been sponsoring a tour for veterans residential living facilities and veterans’ groups in the Tampa Bay area by providing transportation to the Sarasota National Cemetery for a tour of Patriot Plaza on President's Day. Skipping only 2021, this year was the 7th year for this tour which averages between 90-100 visitors.

National Cemetery Director Course Graduation: In April 2023, Sarasota National Cemetery was chosen as the location for the recent graduating class of new national cemetery directors. Patriot Plaza was the perfect venue for this ceremony attended by the Secretary of the VA and the Under Secretary of Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration along with the new graduates and their families.
Suncoast Remake Learning Days: Our region continues to participate in the national Remake Learning Days program that encompasses a 10-day family focused learning festival with multiple venues. Students and their families visited Patriot Plaza during the festival and participated in tours as well as a flag folding event with volunteers from local veterans and students from the Sarasota Military Academy.

Regional Chancellor Karen Holbrook

University of South Florida Sarasota Manatee campus commemorates September 11, 2023
Calendars
The Patterson Foundation continues to publish a 14-month calendar annually featuring Patriot Plaza, Sarasota National Cemetery, and tours and events held at Patriot Plaza. The 2023-2024 PP calendar was the 10th calendar published, with over 5,000 copies shared with Veterans Service Organizations in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties, as well as SNC who distributed hundreds of calendars to families visiting their loved ones. These calendars were distributed to a variety of organizations and individuals including the state and county veteran service offices, as well as each national cemetery.

Patriot Plaza Family Engagement Activity Books
The Patterson Foundation continues to publish the Family Engagement Activity Books that include information and fun learning activities about veterans, the art at Patriot Plaza, flag protocol and other themes. During 2023 four books were published for a total of over 15,400. These can be downloaded and enjoyed by all ages and is a perfect hands-on field trip or teachable moments for all.

Capital Maintenance of PP
Patriot Plaza remains a place of reflection and pride in our community and the upkeep of the physical structure of the plaza remains a priority for The Patterson Foundation.

During 2023 The Patterson Foundation brought in the original engraving specialist to refresh the credits on the Testimonial Tablets—the engraving had become faded and difficult to read.

It was in 2023 that The Patterson Foundation's Patriot Plaza team secured warranty repair work to commence in 2024 that would address structural coating concerns on the support poles around the amphitheater. This restoration work will be completed by summer 2024.

Stone cladding repair work is an ongoing maintenance practice at the plaza. In 2023 stone repairs took place around the rostrum walls and the surrounding walls facing the plaza.
In 2023 SNC opened a new section of the cemetery grounds. The SNC Director, Richard Wallace, along with the SNC team continue to maintain grounds around Patriot Plaza so the guest and visitor experience is edifying and lovely. The SNC construction work has only minimally impacted the visitor experience at Patriot Plaza.

2024 and Beyond Goals for Patriot Plaza Initiative

The Patterson Foundation’s Patriot Plaza Initiative is committed to:

- Celebrate the 10th anniversary of Patriot Plaza
- Continue to support Civics education through EdExploreSRQ via a virtual tour or in-person tour.
- Encourage private charter and home schools to visit PP through the EdExploreSRQ program using the PP video tour until in person field trips are resumed.
- Complete the sharing of the final re-purposed PP artworks to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.
- Nurture and recruit additional volunteers for the PP Guide program.
- Support the National Cemetery Administration’s Veterans Legacy Program by sharing the PP EdExplorations and assisting Sarasota National Cemetery in becoming a “Legacy Cemetery”.
- Continue distribution of 2024 calendars and Family Engagement Activity Books.
- Participate in the 2024 Suncoast Remake Learning Days program with family focused activities at Patriot Plaza.

Summarized by Victoria Finley and Linda Gould, Consultants to The Patterson Foundation’s Patriot Plaza Initiative