



**Department of
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News Release

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VA Names New National Cemetery near Sarasota *Beckley Tapped as First Director of New Cemetery*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has named the future national cemetery to be constructed near Sarasota as the “Sarasota VA National Cemetery.”

Located on a 295-acre site in Sarasota County along State Route 72, the new cemetery will become operational in late 2008. It will provide burials to nearly 400,000 veterans and their families who live in southwestern Florida.

“This new national shrine will be a magnificent, lasting tribute to the service of military veterans in the greater Sarasota area,” said Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield.

VA has selected Sandra M. Beckley as the first director of the new cemetery. Beckley began her VA career in 1972. Before assuming her new duties, she was the director at national cemeteries in Atlanta; Pensacola, Fla.; Mobile, Ala.; and Florence, S.C. She also served at the Danville, Ill., National Cemetery. Beckley begins her new duties this month in temporary office space in Sarasota.

The cemetery’s 60-acre initial construction area will contain 18,200 casket gravesites, a 7,000-unit columbarium, 500 sites for in-ground cremated remains and a scattering garden.

When completed, the new cemetery will also include an administration and public information complex with an electronic gravesite locator and public restrooms, a maintenance facility, entrance and flag assembly areas and a memorial walkway, plus two committal shelters that will use energy-saving solar panels. Other infrastructure elements include roadways, landscaping, utilities and irrigation.

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Sarasota cemetery 2/2/2

VA plans to begin construction in the summer of 2008 in a 15-acre section where burials are expected to begin in late 2008. The cemetery staff will work initially from a temporary office, committal service shelter and equipment facility until construction is completed.

Veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable, their spouses and dependent children are eligible for burial in a national cemetery. Other burial benefits for eligible veterans include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker – even if they are not buried in a national cemetery.

In the midst of the largest land expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 125 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict — from the Revolutionary War to the current war in Iraq — are buried in VA's national cemeteries.

VA also provides grants to states to build new or expand existing state veterans cemeteries to complement national cemeteries. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices or a VA Web site on the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov>, or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

Information about the Sarasota VA National Cemetery is available by calling the VA Memorial Service Network in Atlanta at (404) 929-5899.

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