

voices))) of integrity

Ron Hestdalen

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“Our commitment goes on for eternity.”

I’m Ron Hestdalen. I’m the Director at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies. As the director, I oversee the daily operations of the cemetery, which includes internments, personnel, budget, contracting, and short and long term planning to make sure we’re prepared to meet the needs of our Veterans and family members now and well into the future.

Our primary mission at the National Cemetery is to honor Veterans and their families by providing burial space and marking the gravesite and of course maintaining the cemeteries as national shrines. And we also host visitors throughout the year.

By doing these things and providing these services, we’re able to allow the family to achieve a sense of peace and closure. And our commitment to the Veteran and the family never ends. It starts when they call the funeral home and schedule the internment, and it goes on for eternity.

To me, integrity should be the core value that we live by each day. It’s not only the visible actions, but it’s how you conduct yourself when no one’s watching. How you personally view your job and what’s your mindset. Is it the old adage that it’s good enough for government work? Do you feel like your customers are a burden? If that’s how you feel, I don’t think you belong in today’s Department of Veterans Affairs.

Myself, I’m a retired Marine. I think being a Veteran, you have already proven that service comes before self. And then when you’re a Veteran serving other Veterans, you have that connection with them, because you’ve kind of walked in the same shoes. So you kind of understand how you feel and how you believe. And of course yourself as a leader, you always have to lead by example. So when I walk the cemetery grounds, I’ll stop and talk to the families and ask how are we treating them, if they have any questions. It’s a great way to connect with the families, it’s a great way to find what’s going on in the cemetery, and if there’s any issues or concerns. And it also sends a message to the families that we really truly care about them, and that we’re here to serve.

You know, at the National Cemetery we have a saying that we have one time to get it right. So when the family comes through the front gate of a National Cemetery, we do everything we can to make them feel as if they are the most important people in the world, and they truly are. And my entire staff is dedicated to living the I CARE values and providing excellent service to our customers. And we believe that it’s really a privilege and an honor to do what we’re doing – to be here to serve our Veterans and the community.