

Honored guests, neighbors and friends, welcome to the annual Bridgewater Bradley Gardens Memorial Day ceremony. Memorial Day is one of the most solemn days of remembrance among our nation's holidays. Today we pay tribute to those brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to secure our nation's freedom. Freedom, the ideal we hold most dear. Freedom, the ideal upon which we founded our great nation,

As always, I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of the American Legion, the parade committee, our Public Works staff, first responders and all the parade participants. Your dedication and effort makes our annual ceremony possible and special.

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the American Legion, the nation's largest wartime veteran's service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsoring wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our service members and veterans. Please join me in recognizing the outstanding achievements of the American Legion during the 100 years since its founding, the impact it has had upon society, and particularly the impact of our local post upon our Community.

At this time let us take a moment and recognize anyone among us today who has lost a loved one in the line of duty to our nation. If you have lost someone, please make yourself known so you can be acknowledged. (Thank you. I know it doesn't matter how much time has passed – no words of condolence can adequately console a survivor's grief. Still, each of us gathered here today has a profound respect and appreciation for their sacrifice, and proudly honors them today.)

Since our nation's inception, we have placed and kept Freedom as both our cornerstone and beacon, defining for us and for the world, both who we are and who we wish always to be. While we may be

idealistic, we are not naïve. The cost of Freedom is real, dear and often paid with agony, anguish and lives of our fellow citizens and loved ones lost in war.

Memorials to our war dead exist here and around the globe. Listed among the most famous would have to be the American Military cemeteries in France, such as the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-mer. The cemetery is the final resting place of nearly 10,000 Americans, most of whom lost their lives in the D-Day invasion and ensuing operations.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Normandy invasion, the beginning of the liberation of France and the end of WWII.

Attending as an honored guest will be Bridgewater resident Frank DeVita. Frank enlisted at eighteen years old. On D-Day Frank served on the landing craft. He was responsible for dropping the landing craft door so our troops could take the beach. Frank, as only combat veterans can, understands dedication to duty in the midst of war's horrific events. Also, like every combat veteran I have ever met, Frank is quick to remember those who fell, acclaim them as the heroes and attribute his return to the grace of God. It is my honor to be friends with Frank and it was a privilege to be with Frank and his family celebrating his 94th birthday. He is currently on the Queen Mary sailing to the D-Day commemoration.

Today, we fight in many different parts of the globe. Our soldiers face a difficult to identify enemy. Their encounters are often violent with terrible consequences. The good news is that more and more of our war veterans survive their initial wounds. The bad news is that they often return home facing serious difficulties. Wounds that used to claim lives on the battlefield are instead being treated only to become a lasting part of life for so many who return. The men and women who have sustained serious illness or injury as part of their military service are, right now, fighting their own fights and need our continued moral, legislative and financial support.

As we depart today let us each take a moment to share our reflections with a friend or relative so that others may know the great respect we share for those who serve. Let's spend time today reflecting on service and sacrifice. Let's live in gratitude each and every day for the precious gift they have given to us. And, let's challenge ourselves and each other to demonstrate our gratitude through dedicated and purposeful engagement in the democracy for which they gave their lives.

May God bless and keep close our fallen and our veterans. May God bless and protect those who actively serve in our nation's military, and may God grant them safe return home to their friends and loved ones.

To paraphrase US Army General George S. Patton, "Rather than mourn the men and women who gave their lives in service to our nation, we should thank God that such men and women ever lived."

May you enjoy your picnics and time with family and friends as we start the summer of 2019 and May God Bless America. Thank you.

Dan Hayes
Mayor, Bridgewater Township