

JOURNAL INQUIRER

# East Hartford dedicates cemetery memorial to properly dispose of worn flags

By [Steven Goode](#), Staff Writer Dec 19, 2024



A new flag retirement memorial in East Hartford held its inaugural retirement event Wednesday at the Hillside Cemetery in East Hartford.

Steven Goode/Hearst Connecticut Media

**EAST HARTFORD** — The town's new American Flag Retirement Memorial at Hillside Cemetery was born out of little bit of anger.

The story goes back several years, when Air National Guard veteran Richard Bates was visiting his father's grave at Hillside and placed an American flag. On a

return visit, he noticed the flag was gone and he went to the cemetery office to find out what had happened to it.

"I went to check on what happened and saw flags in the mud and in the garbage," he said.

Bates took his concerns to then-mayor Marie LeClerc. He said he waited a few hours to meet with her and asked her if the town understood the proper flag retirement procedures.

He also expressed his interest in the town creating a place to properly retire old flags.

That interaction prompted Bates, an East Hartford native, to get involved with the town's Veterans Commission and pursue the idea with the next mayor, [Mike Walsh](#), and his chief of staff, [Connor Martin](#).

Ultimately the project, which cost about \$14,000 and was paid for with American Rescue Plan Act funds, was completed with their help, including conceptual drawings from Martin, who is now the mayor.

"He promised me he was going to get it done when he was running," Bates said.

And Martin did. The dedication and first flag retirement ceremony took place Wednesday, with a color guard and about two dozen veterans and town officials in attendance.

"The flag retirement memorial was created to allow the Veterans Commission the ability to conduct a proper U.S. flag retirement ceremony periodically throughout the year," Martin said. "This new space better honors the sacrifice made by our veterans and the importance of the United States flag."

Bates, who conducted the ceremony using Coast Guard guidelines, said the American flags will be cut into four pieces, with the union section kept whole. The stripes will go into the fire first, followed by the union section. Afterward, once the ashes have cooled, they will be buried, unmarked, in another part of the cemetery.

Town officials are encouraging residents to continue to drop off worn or damaged flags in boxes located at Town Hall, the Public Safety Complex, Raymond Library and the Community Cultural Center.

Flags that should be retired are those that show signs of wear, such as fraying or unraveling, fading of colors, tears or holes and stains or discoloration.

"I'm very proud of this community and the emphasis we give to our veterans," Martin said at Wednesday's ceremony.

The memorial features three flag poles, three benches and a fire pit in the center. The ceremony included about 15 flags that were properly disposed.

Town officials said Tuesday they are open to letting other communities use the memorial for their own flag retirement ceremonies.

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### [Steven Goode](#)

STAFF WRITER

**Steven has been a reporter for more than 30 years, spending most of that time at the Hartford Courant. He has covered schools, crime, courts, politics, public safety and business and the mortgage industry. In his free time Steven enjoys camping, going to the beach, reading mysteries, discovering new IPAs and rollercoasters and spending time with his family.**