

The Patriot Guard Riders (PGR) was founded on November 8, 2005, in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma by Jeff and Bonnie Brown with the intention of shielding grieving families from protesters who were determined to disrupt the funerals of their fallen military heroes. This was done in a non-violent manner by PGR members standing “Tall and Silent,” shoulder to shoulder, holding American flags, blocking the families from having to see the protesters. Effectively blocking out the protesters, all that family and friends would see were Patriots holding American Flags and silently, respectfully mourning the passing of their American hero. As detailed in Jeff’s “History of the Patriot Guard Riders” (Attachment 1) the concept grew overnight into a national movement of volunteers, the only requirement for joining the Patriot Guard Riders was, and still is, RESPECT.

As protests grew across the nation, it is felt that the impact of the Patriot Guard Riders and their stoic non-violence stance of patriotism, influenced several state legislatures. Oklahoma is believed to be one of the first states to begin drafting and passing legislation barring such protests at funeral services for fallen heroes. In acknowledgment of the impact of the Patriot Guard Riders, President George W. Bush invited Jeff and Bonnie, along with a handful of PGR members, to the Oval Office to attend the signing ceremony of the “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act”, which basically prohibited such protesting at funerals in national cemeteries.

This ‘solution’ to the protest challenges that created the PGR, would soon shift PGR’s mission as well. Without the presence of protesters, many families and funeral directors now realized first-hand the heartfelt PGR missions and continually requested us to attend services, not to shield from protesters, but to show honor and respect for their fallen hero.

Though never a prerequisite, the vast majority of our initial membership was comprised of Vietnam era veterans, many of whom rode motorcycles and had personal experience with protesters who could not distinguish the war from the warrior. Their silent vow of “Never Again” was answered by their participation in the Patriot Guard Riders.

During the COVID years, PGR did “drive-by’s” to Veterans Hospitals and numerous assisted living facilities where we wished Happy Birthday to some wonderful heroes who needed a break from forced isolation. We have been contacted by local Hospice organizations asking to visit with veterans. We work with Oklahoma Warriors Honor

Flight escorting back and forth to the airport for their trip twice a year. We were even called upon to help escort the Fallen Soldier Silhouette's currently standing in Broken Arrow's Veterans Park.

On a designated day every month, the PGR attends the No One Attending Ceremony at various National Cemeteries. It's a special service conducted for veterans who were buried the previous month, but their families were not available to be present. On that day, for a brief time, we are their family. Our initial goals of honoring the fallen and shielding their families has expanded into areas never initially conceived and yet the PGR recognized the need, accepted the challenge, and stood tall.

To have such a dynamic and evolutionary organization, based solely on volunteers serving so many diverse missions having it's birthplace in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma deserves recognition at Veterans Park. There are literally millions of hearts that have been touched by this organization, on both sides of the flag line, and the legacy of this organization should be recognized for its outstanding accomplishments.

## Attachment 1

### **The History of the Patriot Guard Riders**

The idea of bikers attending military funerals to pay their respects is nothing new. Many veteran and biker organizations have been doing it for years. However, with the birth of the Patriot Guard Riders, the concept has expanded nation-wide and gives riders and non-riders, vets and non-vets, people from all walks of life the opportunity to demonstrate their honor and respect for those who serve our nation.

Having served in the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War, Jeff "Twister" Brown, like so many others of that era, had been discharged and returned to civilian life some 30 years ago. In May of 2005, at the urging of some friends in a motorcycle enthusiast's forum, he made the annual "Run For The Wall" which culminated at the Vietnam Memorial with hundreds of thousands of riders in the "Rolling Thunder" Memorial Day Parade in Washington DC. As is the case with many veterans, this was a life-changing event for him. He recounts having an epiphany on about the third day of the ride. "I was laying awake in my tent, trying to process everything I had been experiencing, when it finally dawned on me...I served four years in the US Air Force over 30 years ago, and this was the first time I ever felt like a veteran."

After returning home to Broken Arrow, OK he became friends with some of the Rolling Thunder members in nearby Coweta. One day they asked him to ride to a military funeral with them as they joined up with a group of American Legion Riders from Kansas. Members of the Westboro Baptist Church were planning to demonstrate at the funeral service of a local soldier who had been killed in Iraq. The plan was to make sure this group did not interfere with the funeral for this hero. This led to Brown attending two or three more funeral missions later on in Oklahoma and Kansas.

In early November "Twister" heard a news report that PFC David Jeffery Martin was being buried on November 8th, 2005, in Edmond, OK and that the WBC planned to picket. He could not find any details regarding the time and place of the funeral, and, in disgust, was forced to go to the WBC website to find the funeral details. Not knowing for sure if any other riders would be there, Jeff decides to head for Edmond to honor Pfc. Martin. Once on the road, he had about a hundred miles to think. He decided then and there to form an organization utilizing the Internet to make riders and veterans aware of upcoming funerals for fallen heroes. Arriving at the church, he had no trouble finding other bikers; the parking lot was full. He located the group of Kansas AL Riders he had ridden with before and told them of his idea. Seeing that there was a definite need, they agreed to help however they could.

When he got home that evening, he drafted an email explaining the need and the plan for the Patriot Guard Riders. That very night he began sending it out to motorcycle and veteran's

groups across the nation. The response was virtually immediate. Within hours replies from across the country began pouring in with people wanting to join and support the fledgling effort. Soon other volunteers with needed skills came forward to tackle issues of web presence, public relations, and a myriad of other tasks. To everyone's surprise, the newly formed PGR had struck a nerve across the nation. Within a matter of days, a preliminary website was launched and the membership in the PGR exploded. Quickly, an initial organizational structure was formed to include national leadership and state captains to insure uniformity in this "army of volunteers" across the country. Within the first year, the Patriot Guard Riders grew from a grassroots effort begun in Broken Arrow, OK to over 70,000 members spread across every state in the nation. The Patriot Guard Riders and its almost 400 hundred thousand volunteer members, has become a national symbol of regular Americans doing the right thing.

## **Patriot Guard Riders Mission Statement / Member Guidance**

### **Mission Statement:**

“The Patriot Guard Riders is a 100% Volunteer, Federally registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization which ensures dignity and respect at memorial services honoring Fallen Military Heroes, First Responders and Honorably Discharged Veterans.”

### **Vision Statement:**

The Patriot Guard Riders is a diverse amalgamation of riders from across the nation. We have one thing in common besides motorcycles. We have an unwavering respect for those who risk their very lives for America's freedom and security including Fallen Military Heroes, First Responders and Honorably Discharged Veterans. If you share this respect, please join us.

We don't care what you ride or if you ride, what your political views are, or whether you're a hawk or a dove. It is not a requirement that you be a veteran. It doesn't matter where you're from or what your income is; you don't even have to ride. The only prerequisite is Respect.

Our main mission is to attend the funeral services of fallen American heroes as *invited guests of the family*. Each mission we undertake has two basic objectives:

1. Show our sincere respect for our fallen heroes, their families, and their communities.
2. Shield the mourning family and their friends from interruptions created by any protestor or group of protestors.

We accomplish the latter through strictly legal and non-violent means.

To those of you who are currently serving and fighting for the freedoms of others, at home and abroad, please know that we are backing you. We honor and support you with every mission we carry out, and we are praying for a safe return home for all.