American fighting forces have sacrificed and died for their nation and fellow Americans for more than two centuries. Many other American servicemen and servicewomen have sacrificed their freedom and endured great hardships as Prisoners of War (POWs) during the history of American military conflict. Many POWs were known to have been taken prisoner but never returned to American soil after hostilities ended. Their whereabouts remain unknown. Since the beginning of World War II more than 80,000 American servicemen and servicewomen continue to be listed as Missing in Action (MIA) around the world. The families of these American MIAs carry the burden of their loved one's loss and unknown fate.

The mission of the Jefferson Barracks POW-MIA Museum is “to reverently honor all who served our country in any branch of the United States military, who were captured by enemies of the United States, or who are missing in action from any year and from any conflict.” As part of this mission, the museum has established the POW-MIA CitySM Program in an effort to raise POW-MIA awareness across the nation.

The creation of the POW-MIA CitySM Program has created an open invitation to municipalities across the United States to join this program and help ensure the national promise “No one left behind … No one forgotten.” is kept. Fenton, Missouri, was the first city in the nation to receive the designation in December 2016, when the program began. Since then, 17 more Missouri cities have reached this designation, including Bellefontaine Neighbors, Jefferson City, St. Ann, Caledonia, Arnold, Farmington, Bismark, Rolla, Fredericktown, Sunset Hills, Piedmont, Greenville, Manchester, Florissant, Perryville, Wentzville and O'Fallon.

Franklin and Wayne counties are officially designated POW-MIA counties in Missouri. Cities in other states are
also starting to realize the importance of recognizing those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and are seeking out the POW-MIA CitySM designation. To date, 14 cities from Ohio, two from Illinois and one from Kansas can claim the title.

On Sept. 20 of this year, during a POW-MIA Recognition Day ceremony, the state of Missouri was designated as the first POW-MIA state in the nation. The proclamation was presented to Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft at the St. Louis Soldiers Memorial Military Museum in downtown St. Louis.

"Each of us owes the highest respect to our soldiers by honoring their courage and commitment, their service and sacrifice," Ashcroft said. "We must all continue to honor those who cannot be with us today so their lives will never be forgotten."

Vietnam Veteran Russ Whitener is the POW-MIA CitySM program chairman and the founder of this project. He says the idea came from seeing the city of Arnold designated as a "Purple Heart City." The Purple Heart City designation is an expression of gratitude to the sons and daughters of that community who gave their lives or were wounded in combat defending the freedoms that all Americans enjoy. The main requirement for a city to become a Purple Heart City is gratitude. This struck a chord with Whitener, who decided to pattern the POW-MIA CitySM after this program. The POW-MIA words "You Are Not Forgotten" ring true for Whitener and so many veterans and citizens across the state of Missouri.

Museum Board Member Lieutenant Colonel Noel Freesh (USA retired) and President of the Jefferson Barracks POW-MIA Museum Paul Dillon worked with Whitener in leading the way for this initiative.

"The museum’s mission is to preserve the history and legacy of our POWs and MIAs and their families," Dillon said. "The new city designation program is one way to help accomplish that. Most of the WWII veterans, many Korean veterans and an increasing number of Vietnam veterans are leaving us. Human nature being what it is, over time the chances increase that their sacrifices and service will be taken for granted or worse, overlooked."

As this program continues to grow, it shows a commitment on behalf of the municipalities and the people of Missouri to recognize our fallen and missing soldiers, as well as POWs. This program asks a city and its citizens to remember and show appreciation for the POW/MIA and their families. Former President Ronald Reagan is credited as saying, "Freedom isn’t free." The POW-MIA CitySM designation is just one way to say, "Thank you." For more information on becoming POW-MIA CitySM contact Russ Whitener at (314) 223-6514.

Ramona Huckstep is a policy and membership associate with the Missouri Municipal League. Ramona has been with the League five years and enjoys getting out to MML-hosted regional meetings and visiting MML members around the state. As the spouse of a veteran, Ramona appreciates the sacrifice of the families and veterans who have served our country.

End Notes:
What Makes A POW-MIA City℠?

The fundamental requirement of the city is to actively participate in raising the awareness of POWs and MIAs. This awareness can be achieved by:

- Displaying a POW-MIA Flag in front of city hall.
- Holding one or more public event(s) designed to raise POW-MIA awareness.
- Placing a remembrance plaque in the city hall listing POWs and MIAs from that city.
- Displaying a “Missing Man Table” at appropriate public events.

How Does My Municipality Become A POW-MIA City℠?

1. The local government from a municipality gets involved either on their own or in partnership with another local organization. There is no cost or fee to the city to be designated as a POW-MIA City℠.

2. The next step is the creation of a presentation highlighting the activities that make your city a POW-MIA City℠, to be presented to the Jefferson Barracks POW-MIA museum board. This presentation will be the basis by which the museum board will determine if a proclamation is warranted. The presentation can be done in person during a museum board meeting or presented in document/visual/audio format for review at a board meeting.

3. Once approved, allow your municipality enough time prior to the presentation of the proclamation to notify veteran groups, civic groups, news media and the general public. Designate a time and place for the proclamation presentation.

4. Share what you have done. Be sure to take several pictures during your city’s proclamation presentation, POW-MIA events, and various awareness activities. Create a press release and share it with local media who could not attend the event.

A network platform there when you need it most.

FirstNet, Built with AT&T, offers the highly secure connections that law enforcement and municipal entities need. That’s why more than 7,250 public safety agencies have already subscribed. FirstNet – purpose built for public safety.

Get the facts at FirstNet.com

©2019 AT&T Intellectual Property. FirstNet and the FirstNet logo are registered trademarks of the First Responder Network Authority.