

Grace for Vets Spreads Nationwide

By Alan M. Petrillo

Mike Mountz, a Vietnam-era veteran, always has felt a deep connection with other veterans. In 2002, he felt so strongly connected that he decided to do something for vets that recognized the service they provided.

Mountz, the owner Cloister Car Washes in Pennsylvania, then had a flex-serve facility in Ephrata, a full-serve in York, a lube in Ephrata and a second flex serve in Lancaster.

“I was only exposed to a small portion of veterans’ sacrifice, but it motivated me to do something for them,” Mountz said.

And thus, Grace for Vets was born.

Grace for Vets is a program that honors veterans and military personnel on Veteran’s Day by giving them a free carwash. The program has spread to all 50 states and one Canadian province.

Mountz served in the U.S. Army from 1968 to 1970 and was honorably discharged at age 19, but he never had to serve in Vietnam. “As our carwash business in Pennsylvania grew, we started offering veterans free carwashes on Veteran’s Day, advertising the promotion in local newspapers and in veteran’s halls around us,” Mountz said. “The first couple of years we did the Grace for Vets program, we washed several hundred cars, something that we were excited about. I think the first year we washed 150 vehicles, but the program continued to grow.”

Mountz said that, to his surprise, the program brought back more to his business than it gave.

“We found that we got loyal customers from among the veterans who realized that we were willing to give back

something free for their efforts,” Mountz noted. “Even if that new veteran customer came back three or four times a year, it was worth it. The program also created a buzz throughout the community and generated a lot of goodwill for us.”

In its third year, Grace for Vets was joined by Hoffman Car Wash, headquartered in Albany, NY, 18 locations strong.

“Tom Hoffman, Jr. told me that their findings were the same (and) that giving vets free carwashes was not only a good thing for the veterans, but it made loyal customers out of them,” Mountz pointed out. “Things were really taking off by this time.”

That’s when Mountz decided to take the Grace for Vets program nationally, to reach out to carwashes and veterans around the country.

“I manned the phones that next year and made calls to carwashes in most of the states myself,” he said. “I estimate that between 30 and 40 percent of the carwash operators who took my calls were open to participating in the program.”

Mountz admitted that by that time, Cloister Car Wash had added an eight-acre carwash facility in Reading, PA, the largest flex serve in the region, so the Cloister Car Wash name was getting well known in the industry.

“That helped open doors for me when I called other carwash operators,” Mountz said. “But essentially, we were doing this program for vets and not ourselves, so even if I got denied nine calls and accepted once, that’s the way it would be. We would move on.”

Producing a website and promoting Grace for Vets on the internet increased its visibility, Mountz noted, as did



The recent Grace For Vets program included participation from all 50 states and Canada.



getting the assistance of a number of friends who stepped up and helped to make promotional calls to carwash operators around the country.

"In the past several years, the website has been instrumental in promoting the Grace for Vets program," commented Mountz. "A web visitor can now go to an individual participating carwash through our website, which gives those carwashes a lot of additional exposure."

For 2010, Mountz's goal was to wash 100,000 cars in all 50 states. He made that goal with room to spare. When all the numbers were tallied, Grace for Vets washed 101,527 vehicles in 50 states and one Canadian province.

"Those were very nice numbers," Mountz said. "In 2009, we washed more than 60,000 vehicles in 38 states."

A Promising Future

What does the future hold for the Grace for Vets program?

Mountz is cautious in making predictions, but would like to be able to increase the number of vehicles washed during the 2011 event by 40,000 to 50,000.

"Right now, we have between five and eight percent of the carwashing market," Mountz said. "Wouldn't it be nice if Grace for Vets were able to get 20 percent of the market? I'd like to think so."

As part of that potential expansion, Mountz is looking to grow the program in Canada, and to reach out to England, Australia and New Zealand, all of which celebrate days honoring veterans. ■

Alan M. Petrillo is a Tucson, AZ, freelance writer and contributing editor of Northeast Carwasher.

For more information on Grace For Vets visit graceforvets.org

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ness network? Are you active in your business community? Are you engaged with your industry trade association? Are you really taking advantage of the all of the resources available to your business? If you answered "no" to these questions, pick up the phone and give us a call; we'd be happy to discuss the resources available to members of the Carwash Association of Pennsylvania.



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