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MCSD and Patriotic Order Sons of America honored Flag Day with flag retirement box

Norristown, Pa., (June 20, 2013) – Montgomery County residents wondering how to properly dispose of old and worn American Flags are able to deposit them in a designated box outside the sheriff's department at the county courthouse. In honor of Flag Day, the Patriotic Order Sons of America (P.O.S. of A.) Washington Camp 523 of Eagleville gifted a red, white and blue flag retirement box to the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department during a press conference.

The idea of making the flag boxes for the sheriff's department was started by members of the Washington Camp 387 of Schwenksville. David McQuirns, Conductor of Washington Camp 523 of Eagleville volunteered to make the flag retirement boxes using his own hand drawn plans.

Stanley Sarnocinski, Master of forms of the National Camp and past Pennsylvania State Camp President said, "Many people ask me how they can properly dispose of their flags, so there is definitely a need for this service. I really hate to see flags thrown in the trash."

The organization has been able to collect and properly retire over 10,000 flags over the past four years. Three thousand flags were recently retired with a ceremony in Schwenksville.

One of the aims of the P.O.S. of A. is to establish a feeling of devotion to country, its institutions, the Constitution of the United States and respect for the flag. It was responsible for the unanimous passing of legislation making June 14th, Flag Day, a national holiday. Congressman and P.O.S. of A. member Francis E. Walter worked with order secretary Charles B. Helms in petitioning the entire membership and working to get legislation that was eventually signed by President Harry S. Truman on Aug. 3, 1949.

Sheriff's Department representative Cpl. Terrence Cullin, who is also an ex-Marine, said it was an honor to accept the flag retirement box on behalf of the Montgomery Sheriff's Department.

Pennsylvania Code regarding flag disposal states that when a flag is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, it shall be destroyed in a dignified way; preferably by burning. Many neighborhoods prohibit setting backyard fires so, providing a flag retirement box gives residents a way to properly dispose of their flag without breaking any local ordinances and keeps flags out of landfills.

"When it starts to lose its colors and is frayed, it's time," Sarnocinski replied to a question regarding the appropriate time to retire a flag.

"It may lose its colors but not its glory," McQuirns added. He said he got choked up when reading a handwritten note found folded within a retired flag that said, "These are the symbols of the country that I love. Please discard these with honor." The note went on to express thanks for providing the service.

The P.O.S. of A. coordinates with local Boy Scout Troop #105 of Schwenksville to perform a proper retirement ceremony at a historic location or event. The blue field of stars is cut from the red and white stripes during a recital of the meaning of each symbol. The flags remnants are then placed in an open pit devised only for flag burning until completely consumed. The ashes are then scattered or buried.

Leslie Richards vice chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, said she admired the beautiful craftsmanship and thought it was a great that the flags will have a final resting place.

"It's like saying goodbye to an old friend," she said.

Read more about the Patriotic Order Sons of America and flag etiquette by visiting www.POSofA.org or www.NationalPOSofA.org. For more information about the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department please visit www.montcopa.org/sheriff.