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Show appreciation for our military

Our armed forces deserve this parade down Main Street on Friday.

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There's a new day, and a new route. But the goal is the same: To show appreciation and respect for those who protect our country.

Greenville's Armed Forces Day Parade will take place on Friday, the evening before the official holiday established in 1950 to honor those who serve, or have served, their country. The parade route has shifted, too.

This year the Armed Forces Day Parade will start at 6 p.m. Friday at Main and Broad streets. Several dozens parade units will travel down Main Street and end in front of the Hyatt Hotel. There will be a short program honoring active, retired and deceased service men and women.

Why the change from Saturday morning to Friday after work? "We're trying to increase participation and we thought by making it a Friday afternoon we might just get people who are leaving work or are here for Friday night," said Russ Stewart, an Army major who has served as the training officer and an assistant professor of military science at Furman University for three years.

Advertisement This is Stewart's third year as officer-in-charge of the parade, and this year's event has added significance for him. Soon after he wraps up this assignment he will head to Iraq for a tour of duty.

Greenville's first Armed Forces Day Parade was held in May 2001. The world seemed a much safer place then, and our military was largely out of sight, out of mind. Four months later, the world changed dramatically. Terrorists struck at the very heart of our nation, and since then the military has taken on an enhanced role in our country.


"I think before 9-11, people really didn't pay attention to what the Army, Marines and Air Force were doing. There's lot more patriotism, a sense of being thankful for the troops for what they're doing," Stewart said.

Bill Harner, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and in 2001 the superintendent of Greenville County Schools, was the force behind the first parade. He couldn't believe this traditionally patriotic community, which is home to so many veterans, didn't have one.

This year's sponsors are familiar names: Furman University ROTC, Congressman Bob Inglis (then-Congressman Jim DeMint was an original supporter), Greenville County Schools, Lockheed Martin and various media organizations.

Parade participants will include active and retired military groups, veterans' organizations, ROTC and JROTC units, bands and this year, for the first time, Blue Star Mothers. Stewart said other units will represent law enforcement and first responders. The terrorist attacks of 9-11 demonstrated how important these first-response teams are to our security.

Don't miss this year's Armed Forces Day Parade. It's worth a few minutes of your Friday evening. As Stewart

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put it, "It goes back to 1776. We wouldn't have this country if not for a few people willing to serve."
