

Americanism Promotion #1 | July 2023
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It is indeed an honor to introduce myself to you; I am Linda Roloff from the Department of Sweet Home Alabama, (by way of the Department of Washington) and I am super proud to be given the chance to work with you as the VFW Auxiliary National Americanism Ambassador /Patriotic Instructor for the 2023-2024 Program Year! “Dude, I am stoked” kind of comes close to describing how excited and grateful I am to be given this honor!

All the men in my family have served our great nation. My father was a Navy veteran and four of his five brothers served as well. My brother was career Navy, and my brother-in-law was career Army. All I ever wanted was to serve my country like the men in my family before me had, but because of my dwarfism, that was never going to happen. It was a devastating feeling.

When I was 23 and working at the bank, I met my husband Eric, a Captain in the Army who had served in Desert Storm. He made me an “Army wife” and it was a title I treasured. We traveled the world and at every stop I found a way to serve my military community; I was finally serving my country! It was while we were stationed in a remote location in Northern Germany that we had our one and only daughter Erica, the joy of my life, and now also a VFW Auxiliary Life Member. And it was there in Bremerhaven Germany that I was awarded the Commander’s Award for Public Service...an Army medal of my very own!

After the Army, Eric felt the void of lost camaraderie, and I felt lost without a mission, and that is when we were introduced to the VFW. Eric needed help applying for his service-connected disability, and the VFW Service Officer provided that help free of charge. We were blown away that there were fellow veterans working together to help each other...in short, we were home.

Since joining the VFW Auxiliary, I have served in many positions, and at every level, culminating as the VFW Auxiliary’s 2020-2021 National Hospital Ambassador. For me, the VFW and its Auxiliary has offered me friendship, mentorship and a safe and encouraging place to raise my family.

Recently, our daughter (your Auxiliary sister) graduated from Auburn University Army ROTC and commissioned in the Army as an Air Defense Artillery Officer, and her new husband (our bonus son) graduated from the Air Force Academy and took his commission into the Army as a Field Artillery Officer! So, I’ve swapped my treasured title of “Army wife” for that of “Army mom”! It looks like I’ll be rehanging my Blue Star banner in my window soon.

It is my belief that I am blessed by God to have been born in this magnificent and exceptional country, where even I can “BECOME!” How could I not want to serve her?



Oh yeah! The time is here! The beginning of the 2023-2024 Program Year brings with it my opportunity to promote patriotism! Yup, you are correct...I'm always promoting patriotism...but now I get to do it on your behalf, be your biggest little fan, and inspire you to great Americanism projects!

Banding Together for Our Veterans

The word patriot signifies a person who loves his or her country and is ready to boldly support and defend it. That meaning has endured since the word's arrival in English in the 16th century, but it has not marched through the years unchallenged...

America is an exceptional three-dimensional idea...WHAAAA???. While other nations were formed around tribal bonds, we are a unique conglomeration of people and experiences. Our forefathers and -mothers chose to come to a new place to form a new way of life side by side with strangers bearing little or no resemblance to themselves. They declared themselves Americans by AGREEING to be!!! Many other countries are tied together by blood, or geographic/traditional “homelands” a.k.a. tribal bonds; we are committed to each other by agreeing to live under a set of ideals and laws that we ourselves designed. This is special, unique and fragile. It will only work as long as we say it does.

Patriotic Instructors

The place that this mindset works best and may serve as an example to our nation is the military. Many individuals enter the service, go through bootcamp, and emerge as ONE high functioning force...one **TRIBE** unified in a brotherhood stronger than most familial ties.

As Patriotic Instructors, your job does not end after the reading at the beginning of your meeting. Rather, it is your obligation to teach the unifying traditions that create our #AuxTRIBE and foster an environment more accommodating to our VFW comrades... y'all know the one...wherein they are able to assuage their **PTS(D)**:

- **Post**
- **Tribal**
- **Separation**
- **(Dysphoria)**

*(Post-Traumatic Stress (Disorder) is a condition service members can experience.)

Seeing our Auxiliary unity, watching us carry out our traditions in how we function with our rituals, and being around us while we are “wearing our gear” in uniform or other patriotic attire, subconsciously reminds them of the unity, elevated status, and common mission that their military experiences and the wearing of their uniforms made them feel. In a word, we can be for them the **TRIBE** they are looking for. With us they will be “home.” As a Patriotic Instructor your role is far bigger than a simple reading and the passing out of a few Flags.

The traditional definition of tribe is: A social group made up of many families or generations that share the same language, customs and beliefs; a group of persons with a common character, occupation or interest.

Now consider with me if you will, the challenges we face as patriots and purveyors of Americanism: It is our Charter, and it is our passion...and yes...it can draw attention, sometimes in a negative way, which leads me to some thoughts on how to navigate this feedback. Read on for what I refer to as a **“Patriot Pause.”**

We in the VFW and its Auxiliary know the price of freedom, we have paid it in blood, with fear, and in separation from our homes and loved ones. We have felt the pain of loss and the elations of victory! We have answered our country’s call and remain committed to its ideals. That’s Americanism people...It runs through our veins and should be on our tongues.

This year, as Americanism Ambassador, I am asking you to be bold in your patriotism and show your American Spirit! Most of you have a cyber presence which gives you an opportunity to celebrate and take pride in our great nation on that platform. Many of us have run across rhetoric to the contrary being spread by others. While it is well within their rights to say the things they say, our first inclination might be to fire back something that only inflames the situation...so here’s what we want you to do: Take a **“Patriot Pause”** and **#takeabreath**. When you see something online or in person that you feel needs to be responded to because it is contrary to your understanding of America, don’t just fire back the first thing that flies into your head in the midst of the flames. Make sure that your response is formulated in such a way as to make your **#AuxTRIBE** proud. Is what you are about to add:

- **Thoughtful** – Have you matched your statement with facts, not just feelings
- **Reflective** - Of our Constitutional rights and responsibilities
- **Inspiring** – Will this change hearts and minds
- **Beneficial** – Can this enlighten those hearing it
- **Elevate** – Will this lift up the conversation and hold high our common values

In this way, you will always have the upper hand, and be able to bring the most sense to the debate. But what if you don’t have an online presence? Then I challenge you to promote patriotism in other ways:

- ✓ Join me in bringing awareness to the issue of Veteran Suicide and observe **#22aday**
 - Every 22nd of the month wear blue and do a **#BuddyCheck** (Take a pic and hashtag it **#AuxTRIBE** and **#22aday**; if you’re not online shoot me that pic.)
- ✓ Fly your Flag, learn Flag etiquette and attend a reverent Flag retirement ceremony
- ✓ Wear your Patriotism: RED – WHITE – BLUE is never out of fashion
- ✓ Talk to your kids and grands about what America is and why they are so lucky
- ✓ Travel around this great land...see its beauty and know it’s people
- ✓ Observe boldly ALL patriotic holidays
- ✓ Have patriotic-themed events and picnics
- ✓ Always check the **2023-2024 National Program Book** to remind yourselves of this Program’s goals!

#MoreThanLetters

In this organization and (thankfully) in our communities we have heard the term, and or seen the “POW/MIA” Flag. Hopefully you’ve been to a POW/MIA Remembrance Ceremony or conducted a “White Table” presentation. This year I’m asking you to do a little mental stretching... instead of saying “POW/MIA” (or the skin crawling “pow-mia” pronounced out like punches in a frame from a DC Comics fight scene...y’all know you’ve heard this...) please commit to speaking the words fully “Prisoners of War and Missing in Action.”

While acronyms provide the luxury of brevity, they rarely convey the fullness of the spoken words. When one hears “POW/MIA” one naturally thinks in terms of how many? or the quantities in each category, in other words...numbers. Our heroes are more than numbers and certainly **#MoreThanLetters!** This year give their sacrifice the full weight of speaking their circumstance back into the minds of those who hear your words. When we say “Prisoner of War” an image of a human in dire confinement and often torture comes into our minds... When we say “Missing in Action” we can visualize the empty spot in that service personnel’s unit where they used to be next to their battle buddy. We can see that empty chair at their loved one’s table and we can feel “the pain of not knowing” their fate, that every one of their family members carries 24/7 without end.

Patriotic Instructors, at EVERY meeting this year, please take a couple of minutes to NAME a Prisoner of War or someone Missing in Action from your vicinity. Tell a bit about them and keep their memory alive. It is our obligation yes, but it is also truly our privilege (provided by them) to do so.

Whatever you are doing, do it with great pride and a sense of American Spirit! America exists because we say it does! If we don’t...she won’t.