

Good morning

On behalf of your MEA Americanism Committee, I would like to say thank you President Larkin, and all of you, for allowing us the opportunity to serve our Association. The committee is working very hard and even though we've needed to change gears a bit recently, I am certainly not complaining. For those of you that are unaware, Grand Lodge has once again made the Americanism Essay Contest a Grand Lodge sponsored event. Please disregard any previous entry forms or manual supplements sent out, and obtain the new forms from the Elks.org website. Click on OUR PROGRAMS, then YOUTH PROGRAMS and you will see the Essay Contest download.

This years contest subject is "What does Veterans Day mean to me?" As usual the contest is open to Division I fifth and sixth graders, and Division II, seventh and eighth graders. All the contest rules basically remain the same, but please note that essays need to be returned to your local lodge by January 10th. This allows the district, state, and national judging to take place by the end of the lodge year.

I find the subject of our Essay Contest quite fitting for the next thing I'd like to talk about. I hope this isn't stepping on the toes of our Veterans Service Commission, but as those of you that were at the opening ceremony of Grand Lodge in Reno heard, there is a startling and upsetting trend happening in our beloved nation right now. Approximately every 65 minutes a military veteran commits suicide. That equates to 22 veterans a day ending their own lives. This rate is actually double the National rate for all other suicides.

There is much debate over what is causing this terrible tragedy, but one thing is known for a fact. Many veterans, especially those young men and women coming home from years of active service are one day, part of a squad, a platoon, a company, and the next day completely on their own. The cohesion and

camaraderie they experienced every day. The “ I have your back, you’ve got mine” is gone.

Well my brothers and sisters, we as Elks of Missouri have an opportunity to help alleviate some of that loneliness. It has been asked of us at our local home Lodges to maybe provide a place for Veterans to come together and meet. A place that they can visit, talk, tell stories, laugh, smile and if necessary, cry. Provide a place that our Veterans can get back even just a little piece of that unity, solidarity , Intercommunication.

We as Elks made a promise. “ So long as there are Veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.” Folks, this exactly what the Elks do. It’s why we exist. I’m sure every Lodge in our great Association has a room in their building that could be spared for a few hours a week. Let’s see if we can make a difference in someones’ life. Go back home, talk to your Lodge, make it happen, get the information to the public so these hurting souls know they have a place to go. But don’t stop there. Hire a Veteran. If your lodge needs a bartender, a cook, a groundskeeper, whatever. If there is some reason your lodge needs to hire an employee, please consider a Veteran. You never know, but we may save a life. We may save a life that willingly signed on the line, took an oath and swore to protect our American way of life.

Yes, I think it is very fitting that our Essay Contest is “What does Veterans Day mean to me?” I look forward to the responses from the youth of our state. But I look more forward to the responses of our Show-Me state Lodges in helping prove what Veterans mean to us. God Bless and may God Bless America.

