★ CONTEST: *AC student win VFW competition*

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era National Guard veteran and her great-grandfather served in the Phillipines during World War II.

Established in 1947, the VFW's "Voice of Democracy" audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year, nearly 40,000 youths in grades 9-12 from across the country enter to win their share of $2 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program.

"My Responsibility to America"

The local and district-winning essay by Alissa Crawford

As a citizen of the United States, I am afforded individual rights, civil rights, human rights, and Constitutional rights. I believe that these rights are a gift from Americans who have forged history before me to fulfill their responsibilities to our country. Like them, I, too, want to carry on that legacy.

My responsibility to America is outlined in these three simple points.

First, my responsibility to America is to be loyal to the country that affords me rights and freedoms. Freedom is a birthright as an American citizen. From soldiers of the Revolutionary War to warriors of World War I to today's soldiers who have continued to serve since the attack on the United States on 9-11, I am responsible to help preserve our way of life, which includes paying my respect to the American flag.

Although his memory has faded some since his death thirteen years ago, my dad has reminded me of the stories of my great-Papaw's military service and his honor to defend his country. Although he didn't talk much about the war, he talked about leaving his rural town to serve his country and the memories of a first boat ride, as well as a first train, plane and automobile ride. He also talked about his meeting the first African American and how his responsibility to serve in a foreign war forever impacted his future experiences. During World War II, as well as other battles, the American flag served to rally and inspire the nation. It symbolized the ideals that our Nation fought for, including men and women who served and sacrificed for me. Therefore, I accept and pledge my loyalty to America and our flag.

Second, my responsibility to America is to defend the Constitution and laws of the United States. It is my belief that this document safeguards the rights of all Americans, and I will do everything to protect it. I wish that others could hear my maternal Grandpa's story of how his family came to America to be granted these freedoms and are grateful for laws that continue to govern this land, yet have afforded his family many opportunities.

To this day, my Grandpa still talks about how my great-great-grandparents migrated from Russia. His family fled Germany generations prior to escape persecution, and they did the same in 1892 when they came to America. He reminisces they didn't live in a house. Instead, they lived in a dugout for 21 months, and when they were able to save money, they built a shack they could afford. With admiration for what his family endured during those hardships, my Grandpa says he is grateful for all the sacrifices they made for him and for five generations of family who have lived off that land. I am thankful for my descendants and others who have paved the way before me by upholding the laws of the United States. Therefore, I accept my duty to preserve what's great about this nation and to follow the law so that future generations can experience it just as I have.

For my third and final point, my responsibility to America is to serve God. Although God is not mentioned in the Constitution, it is my belief that our Founding Fathers, who were members of Christian churches, believed in the same God and prayed to the same God that I do. I am thankful that I live in a country where I have the freedom to attend church, carry a bible, and share the word of God with others. A year ago, God started working in my life to start a bible club at our high school. At the same time, He laid it on a teacher's heart to lead this bible club for God's children to come to a place at school where they could fellowship and pray together. It started out small, and some days weren't so easy with ridicule from classmates and even teachers and administrators. It took prayers from churches, students, and families throughout the county! We've continued to spread God's love, and my prayer has been that someone would accept God as his or her personal Savior, even if it was just one soul! After many prayers, a young lady gave her life to the Lord last Wednesday. I am thankful for my Godly heritage of two families who have leaned on God and their faith through war and hardships. Therefore, I accept and pledge to seek, live, and proclaim my love for God.

In closing, I am immeasurably grateful for my American rights and the legacies my families have left for me to continue. Former President Ronald Reagan best summed it up with this statement, "I believe with all my heart that standing up for America means standing up for the God who has so blessed our land."

CROP WALK RAISES MONEY TO FIGHT HUNGER - Local funds from the CROP Walk were received recently and distributed on February 3. Pictured above, left to right are: Pastor Dale Bost of Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, Crop Walk sponsor and representative of Bethlehem Ministerial Association; Brenda Hartness, representing the Christian Crisis Center of Taylorsville; Martha Starnes of the Good Samaritan Food Pantry; and Rev. Paul Sink, representing the Taylorsville Rotary Club.

Bethlehem/Alexander Crop Walk raises more than $10,000

On October 16, 2016 the Bethlehem/Alexander County CROP Hunger Walk raised $10,123 to fight world and local hunger. This was the fifth year Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church with Church World Services has sponsored the walk. Area churches, civic organizations and businesses participated.

Local funds of $2,530.75 were recently received and were distributed on February 3 at Shiloh Lutheran Church. Distribution was as follows:

* $1,037.61 to Mt. Pisgah Good Samaritan Food Pantry;
* $708.61 to the Bethlehem Ministerial Association Food Voucher Program;
* $379.61 to the Christian Crisis Center of Taylorsville;
* $404.92 to the Taylorsville Rotary Club for the Backpack Program

Crop Hunger Walks are held throughout the U.S. each year in cities, towns and communities. Of the funds raised, 75% goes to world hunger relief and 25% comes back to the local community for hunger relief.

ACPR accepting sign-ups for spring sports

The Alexander County Parks and Recreation is currently holding sign-ups for spring sports. This spring, the ACPR will offer t-ball, instructional softball and baseball, fastpitch softball, baseball, and soccer. The leagues include: 3-4 and 5-6 t-ball; baseball for ages 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, and 13-15; softball for ages 7-8, 9-10, 11-12, and 13-16; and soccer for ages 7-8, 9-10, and 11-13. All soccer will be co-ed teams. The birthday cutoff is May 1 for t-ball, baseball, and soccer and Jan. 1 for softball.

The ACPR will be accepting sign-ups during the month of February at its office in the old Wittenburg School Building on Highway 16 South. Office hours are 8 am until 5 pm, Monday through Friday. The office will be open Thursday, February 23, Friday, February 24, Monday February 27, and Tuesday, February 28 from the hours of 8 am to 6 pm. It will also be open Saturday Feb 25, from 9 am to 1 pm. Tuesday, February 28, will be the last day of regular signups. After February 28, it will be considered a late sign up and will be an additional $20 late fee on top of the registration fee. Anyone who signs up late is NOT guaranteed to be placed on a team.

For more information, call the ACPR at 632-1104.

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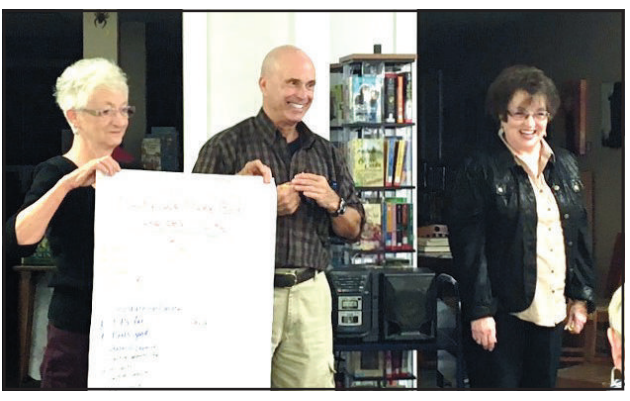

The Alexander County Library, Bethlehem Branch is currently hosting "Let's Talk About It" (LTAI), the book discussion series sponsored by the Bethlehem Friends of the Library (FOL). The session on January 24 was led by Dr. Rick Sipes, LTAI scholar from Iredell County. Participants discussed the book, Brothers and Keepers by John Edgar Wideman. The series concludes on March 7. Those pictured, left to right: Sandy Moore, past FOL president; Dr. Rick Sipes, LTAI scholar; and Ellen Self, LTAI participant.

Bethlehem Friends of Library book sale planned Mar. 23-25

Book lovers of all ages: mark your calendar for the seventh annual Bethlehem Friends of the Library used book sale on March 23-25, 2017. Sponsors are the Bethlehem Friends of the Library. Location is the Bethlehem Fire Department, 7373 NC Highway 127, in Bethlehem.

Donations are currently being sought for gently used books. Such items can be taken to the Bethlehem Branch Library, 45 Rink Dam Road or call the library office at 828-495-8753. Items that cannot be accepted are encyclopedias, magazines, Reader's Digest condensed books, or books that are badly worn and water damaged.

Special hours on Thursday, March 23, are arranged for those who are members of the Bethlehem or Taylorsville Friends of the Library. Those hours are 9-12 noon. Individuals who purchase a Friends membership at the time of sale can take advantage of those special hours. Book dealers can also come for a $25 donation to the Friends.

Regular book sale hours are Thursday, March 23, noon to 6:00 p.m., Friday, March 24, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, March 25, 9:00 to 2:00 p.m. Hardcover books and trade paperbacks will be selling for $1 each. Regular paperbacks and children's books will sell for 50¢ each. Some special bargains will be available on Saturday.

Bethlehem Friends members encourage the public to use this sale as an opportunity to keep books out of the landfill by donating books for the sale and then purchasing low cost, current books.

Proceeds from the sale will be used to support literacy by enhancing services for children and adults at the Bethlehem Branch Library.

The Bethlehem Friends wished to give special thanks to the Bethlehem Fire Department for use of their facilities.

ANNOUNCING . . . .

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