

LASALLE PARISH STUDENTS HONOR VETERANS

Jena High School Veterans Day Essay Winner

Staff Report

As part of the Veterans Day events held recently, Jena High School students participated in the Voice of Democracy Essay Contest.

The school's grand prize winner was junior Isabella Hodges, who also won first place for 11th grade entries. In the essay, she references her father, US Army E-7 Matthew Hugelmann, currently serving active duty, as one of her main influences.

Her award-winning essay is printed below in its entirety:

What Does a Veteran Mean To Me?

BY ISABELLA HODGES

To me, a veteran is someone who carries the weight of service with quiet strength and unwavering commitment. It's not just about battles fought or medals earned—it's about the daily sacrifices made for the sake of others. Growing up with a father who is actively serving in the military, I've come to understand that being a veteran begins long before retirement. It's a mindset, a lifestyle, and a promise to protect, even when it means missing birthdays, holidays, or ordinary moments most families take for granted.

My father has been in the military for most of my life. I've watched him leave for deployments with a calm determination, knowing he was stepping into uncertainty. I've seen the way he carries responsibility—not just for his unit, but for

our family. Even when he's far away, his presence is felt in the values he's instilled: discipline, respect, and resilience. I remember one night when I couldn't sleep, worried about his safety overseas. My mom reminded me that courage isn't the absence of fear—it's choosing to keep going despite it. That's what my father does, and that's what every veteran has done.

Living with an active-duty parent means learning to adapt. It means understanding that service doesn't pause for convenience. But it also means growing up with a role model who shows me what true leadership looks like. My father doesn't boast about his rank or achievements. He leads by example—through integrity, humility, and compassion. Veterans, to me, are people who live with purpose and teach others to do the same. They show us that strength isn't just physical—it's emotional, mental, and deeply personal.

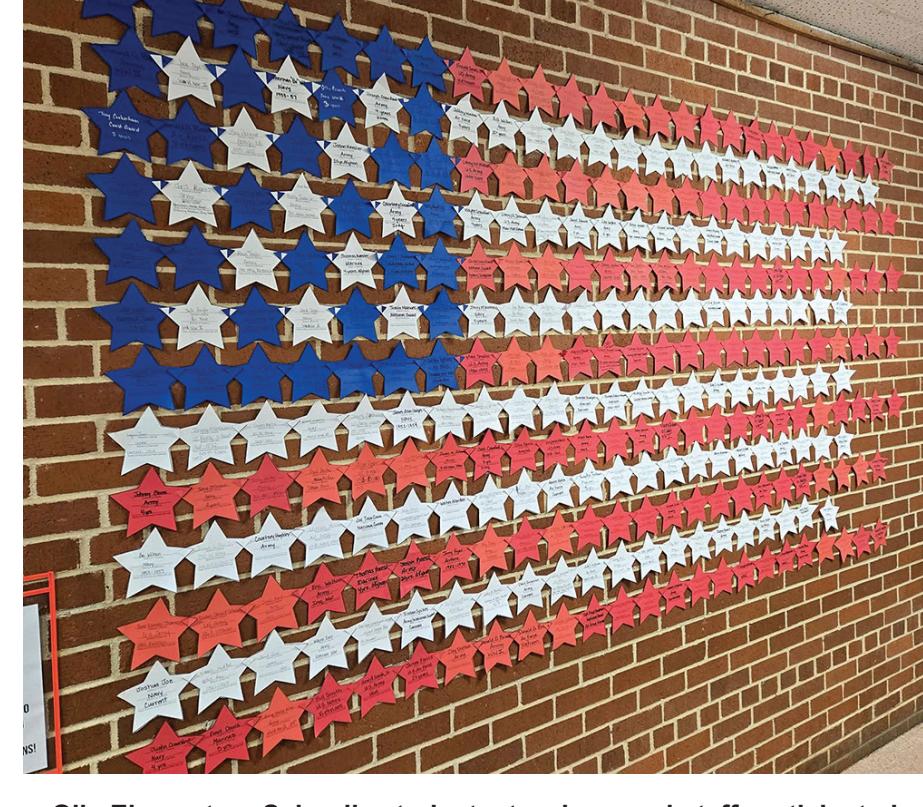
As I prepare to study biology and pursue a career in the medical field, I often think about how the body processes stress, trauma, and resilience. Veterans live with the echoes of their service—some visible, some hidden. My father has taught me that healing is a journey, and that support matters. His experience inspires me to learn not just for academic success, but to understand how science can serve those who've served us. Veterans deserve more than gratitude—they deserve care, understanding, and respect.

To me, a veteran means honor, sacrifice, and



Isabella Hodges

love. It means choosing others over themselves, even when the cost is high. My father's service has shaped who I am. His strength has become my foundation, and his values guide my choices. Veterans are not just heroes in history books: They are parents, neighbors, mentors, and protectors. They remind us that freedom is a gift, and that every day we live it is a chance to honor those who made it possible.



The "Giant Ambassadors" of Jena Junior High School, a group who embody the Giant spirit and go above and beyond for their school all year, lead the charge in a flag sponsorship initiative. This is the second year that the fundraiser has been held and allows students at JJHS to purchase a flag in honor of their favorite veteran. The flags were placed under the flagpole in front of the school, along with the name of the veteran to whom they were dedicated. The money collected was donated to the LaSalle Parish Honor Guard. The Giant Ambassadors were proud to honor local heroes and take time to show JJHS' appreciation to each veteran for their service!



Fellowship Elementary School held a Veterans Day program on Tuesday, November 11, where students honored their "favorite" veteran. Students created posters of their veteran including photos, drawings and facts (photo at left) and students escorted their veteran into the gym at the start of the school's program. Many parents, grandparents, family friends and others were honored during the event and the entire school paid tribute to the local heroes.

This special Veterans Day Section is sponsored by the following businesses and individuals:

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Thank You, Veterans!