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VFW Honors Poplar Bluff Teacher with State Award

FEBRUARY 13TH 2019 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - An American history teacher at Junior High received a statewide honor through the VFW Citizenship Education program for her efforts co-teaching the 'I'm A Citizen, Too' summer enrichment class.

Only the second Poplar Bluff teacher to reach the state level of the annual program in district history, Kathy Pattillo won the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher award for the middle school grade-span on Saturday, Feb. 2, in Jefferson City.

"She has a passion for teaching, a love for children and an unquenchable spirit that represents the qualities of the ideal VFW Teacher of the Year," wrote former R-I educator Jan Desgranges in the nomination letter for her daughter, Pattillo. "Believing in her students, she teaches American government with her heart and strong passion at the Poplar Bluff Junior High."

Desgranges, who founded 'I'm A Citizen, Too' about 30 years ago, was the district's previous statewide award winner around the year she retired in 2008. While Desgranges continues to lead the summer school class, Pattillo has assisted for five years, with plans to take it over once her mother passes the baton.

"I made that promise to Mrs. D," Pattillo stated. "It's a passion of mine. It's also my mom's legacy."

The program teaches students, grades 5-8, what it means to be productive citizens to one's family, community, state and nation. Students who are recruited, around 50 each June, learn about the environment through the Mingo National Wildlife Refuge; are taught how the Chamber of Commerce attracts businesses; tour the police and sheriff departments; conduct a mock city council meeting; act out a trial at the county courthouse; and are shown how a bill becomes a law by state legislators.

The students take a field trip to either the Capitol or perform a patriotic program at a Springfield Cardinals game. One of Pattillo's favorite parts of the itinerary, an assembly is hosted for area veterans and students visit the John J. Pershing VA Medical Center.

When Pattillo's four grown children were younger, she recalls them participating on a float constructed by the class in the city's Fourth of July parade. As a child herself, she said she can remember placing flags on the gravestones of her veteran family members every Memorial Day.

"Growing up in my home, you knew how blessed you were to be an American," Pattillo said. "By the time I was 12, I knew the preamble."

Pattillo was recognized at a banquet hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary alongside a teacher at Truman Elementary in Rolla and an educator at Pattonville High School in Maryland Heights.

The previous weekend, JROTC instructor Command Sgt. Maj. Marc Roderick of PBHS was also honored as the top secondary teacher by VFW District 15 in Cape Girardeau on the regional level of the program. Both Pattillo and Roderick received their initial awards from local Post 6477 in December.

"His zeal for our nation is infectious and permeates his classes," wrote Roderick's superior Maj. Gregory Crites in a nomination letter. "It is truly gratifying to see 'Gen Z' students transformed into cadets who understand and appreciate why our nation is so special."

Pictured: Marc Roderick, who spent 28 years as an infantryman in active service before becoming the senior non-commissioned officer over the JROTC program, was named the VFW District 15 secondary Teacher of the Year.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff Schools

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