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# GRANT PROPOSAL

## American Veterans Institute Education Program

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**Total Project Budget: \$268,994.00**

### **1) Name, address and phone number of requesting organization**

*American Veterans Institute*

4 East Main Street

Suite 200

(P.O. Box 85)

Tipp City, OH 45371

Office: 937.669.2040

Mobile: 937.367.1926

E-mail: [Info@AmericanVeteransInstitute.org](mailto:Info@AmericanVeteransInstitute.org)

Web site(s): [www.AmericanVeteransInstitute.org](http://www.AmericanVeteransInstitute.org);

[www.VetAssist.org](http://www.VetAssist.org); [www.NationalOWH.org](http://www.NationalOWH.org)

### **2). Statement of project purpose**

The American Veterans Institute is developing a **comprehensive education program tied to the service and sacrifice of our nation's GIs**. This ambitious initiative is currently being introduced in Ohio and Indiana schools, and offers an innovative approach to conveying American history and the individual experiences, impressions, and lessons of those who played an active role in preserving our nation's freedom.

Our program goals are as follows:

- encourage young people to better understand and embrace American history;
- address identified deficiencies in how American history has traditionally been presented to young people in classroom situations;
- infuse students with a better understanding of the service and sacrifice of the men and women who have risked, and often given, their lives to preserve America's freedom;
- give students a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities as Americans, and the foundations of their freedoms;
- give students a clear understanding of why we celebrate or honor such holidays as Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and other patriotic dates and observances;
- use the individual stories of America's GIs and relatable people or situations to help children personalize the qualities and responsibilities of leadership and the people who have shaped America's history;
- help young people understand the importance of preserving their own family histories;
- help young people understand how they can become leaders and role models in their own lives.

- tie all lesson plans to state academic content standards for ease of inclusion in the classroom;
- build lesson plans tied to history, civics, government, language arts, science and technology, as well as leadership and citizenship.

### **3. The Challenge: Statement of problems addressed by the AVI education program**

American educators confirm that there are long-standing issues regarding how social studies/history curriculum is implemented and absorbed in our public schools. Teachers are challenged by time constraints, the demands of proficiency testing, and available material that fails to inspire or motivate students because it fails to make the necessary personal connections that students need in order to process and retain information. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) notes that young people view the world from an egocentric standpoint; that is, they view history and current events based on how such things impact them directly – or those with whom they have regular contact (parents, grandparents, friends, neighbors, etc.)

With regard to teaching Social Studies and history, the NCSS noted that “the concept of time is difficult for young children, but they do need a sense of the past in order to understand how the present has come about, as well as to appreciate their heritage.” The organization further observes that: “The early years are the ideal time for children to understand democratic norms and values (justice, equality, service, etc.) in terms of smaller entities (the family, classroom, and community). Applying these concepts to the nation and the world will be easier if one understands and appreciates them first on a smaller scale.”

Teachers argue that the problem is finding the time to weave personalized elements into static tools such as text books, or finding materials that meet state academic content standards while offering avenues by which young people can personalize social studies and history to their own families, classrooms, or communities. To make matters worse, the National Council for History Education (NCHE) points to an “alarming and documented decline of classroom hours devoted to the teaching of history in our schools” due, in part, to the unintended impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law’s emphasis on testing in reading and math.

Theodore Rabb, Chairman of Trustees for the National Council for History Education notes that, in teaching history, “flexibility is crucial...Students think history boring because of the straitjacket imposed by a lockstep curriculum, supported by tedious textbooks, that promote ‘teaching to the text.’”

The NCHE notes that a recent survey by Purdue University revealed that, at the elementary grades, social studies and history have virtually vanished. In Indiana, teachers spend on average 12 minutes A WEEK on these subjects. The other 49 states report similar deficiencies. If a student is not exposed to, and does not begin to understand and enjoy the study of history while he or she is young, then this will not likely be a habit they suddenly acquire and embrace in the higher grades.

Diane Ravitch, professor of education at New York University, noted in a recent article for the *GreatSchools.net* web site that "History keeps people from being ignorant. A nation that forgets its history can be manipulated. It doesn't make you a better person to know history, but it does make you a better citizen."

The same *GreatSchools* article observed "There is hard evidence that we have a problem with how history is being taught in the United States. In its most recent report on student achievement in U.S. History, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — also known as 'The Nation's Report Card' — showed that only 17% of eighth-graders and 11% of 12th-graders performed at or above the proficient level in U.S. history."

"NAEP scores are highly regarded by people regardless of their political views," says Jeffery Mirel, a former middle school U.S. history teacher and now a professor of history and education at the University of Michigan. "Overall, it's a good test and gives a good picture of what the students know. If U.S. history teachers were doing a bang-up job and students were putting in high-quality effort, then everybody would be proficient. The second and more important problem is that there isn't a lot of high-quality history teaching going on."

Garth Holman a social studies teacher at Beachwood Middle School, a twice recognized National School of Excellence, in Beachwood, OH, has researched this topic and defines the contemporary issues thusly: "Social studies classes today are taught by default. Textbooks are the driving forces in curriculum. Material becomes something "to cover" as fast as possible so that movement can progress toward the more relevant modern world. Teachers are not likely to spend time on student-centered learning activities because it takes time away from the required curriculum. Many teachers use a lecture, teacher-guided approach to cover the curriculum quickly. Students then write out answers to questions and complete exams that are based on the textbook and the teacher guided lecture. This combination is used to save time. Research points out that student-centered activities, such as cooperative learning, the seven intelligences, and learning styles are a vital part of a quality curriculum. However, these ideas are rarely taken into account when developing social studies curriculum (White 1998, 1-2). **The media reports that business is not happy with the communication or team-working skills of many high school graduates.** The results are clear; too many students lack any real understanding of the past and forget required facts soon after the test."

Holman concludes with an observation that has become a rallying cry of sorts, as educators actively seek new ways to energize their approach to history and social studies. "What society is left with is a large number of adults who lack a historical understanding of our world and even dislike the word 'history'. This approach has not worked. Therefore, the time has come to look at alternative approaches to teaching American history to our youth," he affirms.

Whatever the core cause(s), there are clearly long-standing issues with regard to how students and teachers approach history and its related disciplines.

The American Veterans Institute (AVI) is creating tools and lesson plans that will allow teachers to capture student attention and imagination, and present history based on “relatable concepts, situations, and individuals” that will challenge and energize young people. We are working with education experts, universities, teachers, and students to build, refine and test our education program in order to address the challenges outlined in this section. The solutions, outlined below, explain how AVI and its partner organizations will address these concerns via its education program.

The goal of the program is to make these materials available to students and teachers at no cost.

#### **4. The Solution:How will our education program address the challenges?**

While there is no single solution for the multiple challenges of teaching history and social studies to young people, the American Veterans Institute has taken a deliberate approach of developing content and materials that will help young people see the human side of history, and relate it to people and situations in their own lives. By using real-life veteran stories and memoirs (as collected by AVI, the World War II Victory Museum Oral History Project, and other sources) AVI is building books, DVDs, lesson plans and other teaching tools that will achieve one or more of the following goals:

- relate history and historical events to individuals or situations in the students’ lives;
- provide a unique “color commentary” on history by giving students emotional and behavioral connections to history (through veteran commentaries, memoirs, and personal interaction), thus allowing students to understand the human response to historical events which, in turn, gives them greater empathy for the individuals who “made history”;
- give students an appreciation for the service and sacrifice of the men and women of America’s military;
- give students the understanding that history is “made” by real people who are not so different from the students themselves – and that they, too, have the capacity to make a difference and “make history;”
- give students varying perspectives on individual historical events and make them better able to compare, analyze and interpret information based on the sources and perspectives provided;
- give students a better appreciation for the diversity of America’s military, and the courage and contributions of a multitude of ethnicities and cultures;
- give students a personal stake in preserving history – make them historians/authors in their own right and give them “ownership” of history;
- give students a better grasp of their rights and responsibilities as Americans, and the foundations of their freedoms;
- give students a clear understanding of why we celebrate or honor such holidays as Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and other patriotic dates and observances;
- give students the building blocks of leadership and help them understand how to become leaders and positive role models in their own lives;

- create an inter-generational dialogue that helps young people connect to previous generations through shared emotions, reactions and experiences.
- meet the proficiency standards required of teachers so that materials can be introduced into the classroom without fear of losing the academic standards requirements.

Because AVI focuses on veteran and military history, our curriculum is rooted in the American experience as it applies to our veterans and our nation’s global and regional conflicts, but the goal of the program is much broader. The objective is not to militarize students or recruit future GIs; rather, **the goal is to engage students in thoughtful discussion and activities involving leadership, democracy, historic preservation, the rights and responsibilities of American citizens, the role of the military, and the role of the United States in the global arena.** Only by understanding such interactions in the context of history, can young people hope to chart a better course for the future. The objective is to stimulate interest and enthusiasm in students that will allow them to ask questions, posit solutions, and become effective leaders in their own communities and, ultimately, on the world stage.

**“Indeed, far from militarizing students, our over-arching goal for the program is to inspire a generation of leaders who have the historical perspective to *prevent* wars, rather than *start* them,” said American Veterans Institute founder Mike Jackson, Lt. Col. USAF (ret.)**

**These issues addressed by the AVI education program are as applicable locally as they are nationally.** Our conversations with teachers at the local level confirm that they, too, seek new ways to engage young people and hold their attention.

*“We are encouraged to teach our students about the importance of observing Veterans Day, but there is very little out there that meets academic content standards and is actually interesting to the kids...something they can relate to. The books and lessons by the American Veterans Institute are unlike anything else available to us. Every teacher I have showed these materials to wants copies.”* **Mary Linzmeier, First Grade Teacher, Oakwood City Schools, Oakwood, OH.**

*“These are timely and compelling stories that children and adults will each relate to in their own way. The lesson plans are well-crafted to allow integration into the classroom without sacrificing the needs of the proficiency tests. Young people will enjoy the books and the activities...and will gain some much needed historical perspective in the process. Even more important, they will be able to relate to other generations and experiences through the stories and characters featured in the books.”* **Mr. Kim Lobsiger, Principal, Garrett High School, Garrett Keyser Butler School District in Indiana.**

*“This series offers stories that students of all backgrounds and experiences can relate to...and it offers practical lesson plans that teachers will enjoy sharing with their classes. The leadership component is a timely and important topic that can and*

*should be a part of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Classrooms. This program allows young people to personalize the concept of history. If they personalize history then they will understand their own ability to change it.”* **Cindy Hauler, Teaching Specialist, Dayton Public Schools.**

The lesson plans and activities we are developing will be tied to state Academic Content Standards, allowing teachers to easily integrate them into their daily classroom activities. The state of Ohio mandates that teachers must devote a specific amount of classroom time to educating students on patriotic topics such as the significance of Veterans Day. But teachers and administrators agree that there is not a great deal of available material that truly touches the young people. AVI President Mike Jackson, a former educator who also served two terms on the Tipp City Board of Education and one term on the Miami Valley Career Technology Center Board of Education, notes that *“it is easy to drag in some old veteran to speak – and I can say that because I am one – but these kids can’t relate to that old guy standing up there droning on about when he was young. They need to see him as a young person...they need to relate his hopes and fears to their own. They need to somehow make that personal connection that allows them to care about the individual and relate his experiences to their own lives. AVI’s education program will do just that through its Research Library collection, its DVDs, its book series, and much more. We are not just building curriculum; we are building solutions.”*

## **5) Organizational objectives and history**

The organization was founded in 2004 by retired Air Force Officer and disabled veteran Lt Col Mike Jackson, USAF (Ret) and by former journalist Tara Dixon Engel. The organization became an Ohio Domestic Non-Profit in 2005 and received its official IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt designation in 2006. Although the organization was formally conceived in 2004, its roots go back much farther. Col. Jackson had been working since 1992 on numerous veteran-related support activities, including advocating on behalf of improved VA benefits and working with unemployed and underemployed veterans to assist in job training and preparation. In 1997, his volunteer work on behalf of veterans was recognized at the state level through his induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame and his recognition by the American Red Cross as a “Hometown Military Hero.”

The American Veterans Institute was founded with several goals in mind:

- to preserve the individual histories and achievements of America’s veterans by establishing an *American Veterans Hall of Honor* and an *American Veterans Research Library*;
- to use those individual life stories as a foundation for grades K-12 curriculum that seeks to correct identified deficiencies in the presentation and student retention of social studies disciplines, specifically American history, civics, government, and related sub-domains;
- to use collected/preserved veteran achievements to quantify key leadership traits and develop a comprehensive leadership curriculum for young people;

- to assist communities and organizations in the development and implementation of celebrations and programming that honors and recognizes the service and sacrifice of America’s veterans;
- to introduce and/or support programs that assist veterans in the areas of VA benefits, professional development or veteran-to-veteran assistance;
- to develop one or more educational book series that help young people understand and appreciate the impact that American veterans have had on the quality of life in the United States, both during military service and afterward in the civilian sector.

## **6) Contact person**

Tara Dixon-Engel  
Vice President  
American Veterans Institute  
937.669.2040

## **7) Copy of IRS Determination Letter**

Attached

## **8) Qualifications of key personnel**

Two full-time staff:

*Mike Jackson, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)*  
Founder and President  
Please see attached qualifications sheet

*Tara Dixon-Engel*  
Founder and Vice President  
Please see attached qualifications sheet

During the development phase of this program, most of the program development is being done by these two individuals in concert with University participants and our curriculum consultants. As you will note on the attached biographies, both individuals have extensive experience in curriculum development and non-profit programming development. Their efforts are also being supported by personnel at the National Military History Center. Administrative support will be added as needed, but the goal is to keep a tight rein on costs and a clear path toward the program vision. Once the program is implemented outside of the Greater Miami Valley, staff will be added through the American Veterans Hall of Honor and the American Veterans Research Library to support the project and to implement related outreach efforts.

## **9) Organizational Vision**

*“Serving those who served with honor”*

## **10) Organizational Mission**

The American Veterans Institute seeks to individualize the American perspective on military service by touching the lives of those who have served...and by sharing their stories and legacies with the civilian population. We achieve our mission through a three-pronged approach of *Celebration*, *Preservation* and *Education*. Each component of our mission is linked to one or more of these prongs:

A. To honor and acknowledge America's military veterans through local, regional and national initiatives, celebrations, or memorials designed to draw attention to the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform.

B. To acknowledge and perpetuate the legacies of America's military veterans, by preserving their achievements, leadership skills, and personal recollections through a variety of initiatives (American Veterans Hall of Honor, American Veterans Research Library, searchable database, video history, Gift of Remembrance project, etc.) that allow for access, research, and enlightenment by current and future generations.

C. To develop K-12 curriculum tied to Academic Content Standards that promotes and encourages greater appreciation for the significance of military service in shaping all aspects of American society. To develop curriculum that gives students a compelling personal relationship with American history and with the "average" citizens whose lives have shaped that history. In so doing, we seek to create a stronger kinship between the civilian public and America's veterans.

D. Develop programs and support initiatives designed to inform and assist veterans in such arenas as VA benefits, specifically the VA Improved Pension program, professional advancement, and personal growth.

E. To develop and implement leadership classes and curriculum based on the achievements of veterans featured in the Hall of Honor and Research Library. Make these leadership lessons applicable to the civilian sector in classroom, organizational, and business settings.

F. To establish and maintain a network of communications (via direct mail, internet web sites, a quarterly magazine, and numerous other avenues) between veterans, their families, their descendants, veterans' advocates, educators, and civilians interested in veterans issues and American military history topics.

## **11). EDUCATION PROGRAM**

### **11A Time frame & staffing**

Phase One: Curriculum and materials development, and introduction to Ohio and Indiana Schools

Time frame: January 2009 - January 2011

Curriculum Development Team:

**Mike Jackson, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret)**

BA in Education (Ohio University); Masters in Business (Webster University)  
Former Professor of Aerospace Studies (Wright State University)  
Former Air Force Instructor Pilot  
Developed curriculum for joint American-South Vietnamese pilot training  
Executive Director Emeritus, National Aviation Hall of Fame  
Author, *Naked In Da Nang* (Zenith Press 2004); *The Wright Brothers: First In Flight* (Sterling Publishing 2007); *Neil Armstrong: On Giant Leap* (Sterling Publishing 2008)  
1997 Inductee, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame

**Tara Dixon Engel**

Award-winning video script writer and journalist  
Author, *Naked In Da Nang* (Zenith Press 2004); *The Wright Brothers: First In Flight* (Sterling Publishing 2007); *Neil Armstrong: One Giant Leap* (Sterling Publishing 2008)  
Former Adjunct Professor of Fine Arts  
Developed curriculum for Sinclair College Electronic Publishing Program  
Developed National Aviation Hall of Fame *Project SkyReach* curriculum  
Former Director of Research, National Aviation Hall of Fame

**Dr. Terry Maris, PhD**

BGS, University of Nebraska  
MBA, University of Nebraska  
PhD, University of Nebraska  
Former Dean of Business College, Northern Ohio University  
Executive Director, ONU Center for Cuban Business Studies  
Professor of Management  
2007 Inductee, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame

An Academic Advisory Board, consisting of Elementary, Junior High and High School teachers and administrators will also be evaluating the materials and submitting ideas.

A list of board members is attached.

11B. Total program budget for Phase One:

Salaries:

Team Leader, curriculum development	\$46,000/yr
Education Coordinator, curriculum development	\$40,000/yr
Administrative support	\$25,000/yr
Temp. Part. Time support	\$8,000/yr

Materials costs

Ink jet cartridges	\$1,276
Paper supplies	\$668
Books, manuals, academic content standards materials	\$950

<u>Research costs</u>	\$2,500
<u>Travel costs</u> (on-site meetings with partner universities & organizations)	\$3,100
<u>Educational Web Site</u>	
Web design	\$18,000
Web content	\$5,000
Hosting and related costs	\$3,500
Web maintenance	\$8,000
<u>Equipment</u>	
Dedicated printer/copier	\$6,200
Three laptops	\$5,500
Software	\$1,800
Powerpoint projector for classroom and orientation use	\$2,100
Carrying cases, supplemental equipment (flashdrives, peripherals)	\$950
<u>Educational Book Series Production</u>	
500 copies x six books = 3,000 books	\$14,000
Author costs -- \$1,500 per book x six books	\$9,000
Illustrator costs -- \$2,000 per book x six books	\$12,000
Distribution & advance teacher review (local, regional, some national)	\$2,500
Misc. Expenses (research and testing)	\$1,500
<u>Teacher orientation</u>	
Six Teacher Resource Days for multiple districts @ \$800 each	\$4,800
<u>Video "Docu-Minis" supplements (World War I, World War II, Korea, The Role of the Military)</u>	
Writing and Research x four videos - \$3,500 x 4	\$14,000
Production of videos x four videos - \$7,200 x 4	\$28,800
Replication of DVDs 250 x 4 = 1,000 x \$3.00 ea	\$3,000
Distribution	\$850
<b>Total Development/Implementation Costs – Phase One -</b>	<b>\$268,994.00</b>

All costs will be tracked and shared with partners on a quarterly basis.

Grants that have been received thus far have gone entirely to project development and implementation, with no salaries paid. This support includes \$88,000 from the **Paul G. Duke Foundation/Columbus Foundation** in 2007, which supports our project VetAssist initiative helping elderly and disabled veterans learn about and apply for the VA's Improved Pension Program; \$5,000 from Vectren Corporation for education; \$2,500 from **Bob Evans Restaurants** to support the 2006 Operation Welcome Home celebration; \$2,500 from **VA Mortgage Company** to support education initiatives; over \$5,000 in in-kind donations from **CMD Technologies** to support web development and

maintenance; \$1,000 from the **John and Rosa Gover Foundation** to support the cost of paying an artist to illustrate the prototype for *Welcome Home Grandpa*; \$1,000 from Regina Butler, AVI Board Member, to support general education initiatives. Recently, the **Tipp City Area Community Foundation** donated \$1,212 toward production of books for Tipp City Schools. Likewise, the **Miami County Foundation** has donated \$5,000 toward curriculum development costs, and the Tipp City Branch of National City Bank has donated \$500 toward education. We are seeking the necessary funding to cover our program development costs for the next 12-18 months, so that we may begin distributing materials and lesson plans free of charge to regional schools during the 2009-2010 school years. Additionally, the American Veterans Institute recently secured a \$200,000 grant on behalf of the National Military History Center from the Dekko Foundation in Kendallville, Indiana. This grant will primarily support the NMHC's efforts to implement education programming internally, although a small portion of the grant is helping to cover joint AVI/NMHC lesson plan development costs.

### **11C. AVI education project objectives and examples**

#### **School Educational Programming:**

K-3: This programming will feature fundamentals on what a veteran is, what the military does, what the branches of the armed services are, and what the various patriotic holidays represent (i.e. Flag Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day). The purpose is not to “militarize” students but to give them a sense of the heritage that has secured their freedom, and to introduce them to the purpose for some of the patriotic holidays that are often overlooked, minimized or misunderstood – even by adults. Case in point: a recent request for materials from a school teacher who thought that Veterans Day and Memorial Day were one and the same. The goal is also to teach young people at an early age that “history is fun” and to encourage them to begin looking for the “history makers” in their own families. There will be a strong component of reading, writing, and comprehension at this grade level.

4-7: Classroom discussion and interviewing/observational skills will be emphasized at this level. Students will read compelling hand-outs outlining the history of the Armed Forces as well as personalized accounts from veterans of diverse backgrounds. Students will be encouraged to find the heroes in their own families and preserve their stories. A yearly class project will involve selecting and nominating (and preparing a nomination package) a veteran for the American Veterans Hall of Honor – and, in the process, learning about the branch of the military, the unit, the conflict or era in which the veteran served. Additionally, the preparation of the nomination package will encourage team work, organizational skills, written communications, persuasive writing, critical thinking, English skills and much more.

8-12: Digital presentations, research, and role-playing will form the foundation of this element of the education program. Students will view “docu-minis” (8-15 minute documentaries) on the role of American GIs in various conflicts (initially, 20<sup>th</sup> Century conflicts such as WW I, WW II, Korea and Vietnam). Classroom discussion topics will

include individual veteran histories from each conflict – how and why the veteran served; what his/her contribution was, what the long-term impact of the conflict was. Peacetime military service will also be spotlighted as students discuss and debate the historic reasons for military service in U.S. and how those reasons are similar to or different from military service in other countries. A heavy leadership component will be featured at this level of programming. Through the examples provided by Hall of Honor inductees, students will learn about courage, honor, duty, integrity, selflessness, the skills necessary to motivate people, the need for leadership in any situation, etc. Students will select a famous veteran and prepare a report or video essay on the elements of his or her leadership style and the impact of his or her service.

### **Teaching Tool Example: *Embracing Freedom Book Series***

Below, offset in brown text, is a detailed explanation of one of the key educational components of this proposal. The *Embracing Freedom* book series, aimed at grades K-3 and 4-7, will not be the only education tool for that age range but it will be one of the most prominent ones – and one that can be utilized by parents and teachers alike. This series has been developed because the K-7 group is one of the more difficult age ranges in which to share military history and related lessons. Many aspects of America's military history are too complex or too unsettling for young children. Yet there is a demonstrated need for effective methods for introducing our young people to the service and sacrifice that has paved the way for the freedoms they enjoy...even as small children.

Below, we offer the details of this book series, not to spotlight it as our primary teaching tool but to underscore the AVI's proactive and innovative approach to educating ALL Americans about the foundations of freedom, and to solving some of the existing issues with regard to engaging students and retaining their interest and enthusiasm.

#### *Embracing Freedom Book Series By Tara Dixon-Engel and Mike Jackson*

This American Veterans Institute series will be a multi-book series for children in grades K-3 and 4-7 (broken down by age ranges 10 and under, or 10 and up), and designed to entertain and educate youngsters on the foundations of the freedom they enjoy as Americans. The educational theme of each book will be gently presented from a child's perspective and will help spark an early interest in American history, current events, and the civic responsibilities of every American.

The series will espouse no political viewpoint but will help children personalize the concepts of freedom and American history. In addition to making the books commercially available, the American Veterans Institute is working with several universities to develop lesson plans, activities, and a teacher-student oriented web site so the books can be used in the classroom. Lesson plans will be tied to the book themes as well as to Academic Content Standards in social studies and language arts, so that teachers can present the content within the parameters of their proficiency requirements. Each book will be based on real people and/or real experiences. The idea is to use relatable individuals and experiences to help spark student interest in American history, civics, government and current events. The books will be endorsed

by the American Veterans Institute and tied to its American Veterans Research Library and American Veterans Hall of Honor, which will be part of the pending expansion of the World War II Victory Museum in Auburn, Indiana.

### **Background**

The founders of AVI, Mike Jackson and Tara Dixon-Engel, are the authors of *Naked In Da Nang* (Zenith Press, 2004), *The Wright Brothers: First In Flight* (Sterling Publishing, 2007) and *Neil Armstrong: One Giant Leap For Mankind* (Sterling Publishing, 2008). They have also edited books for Simon & Schuster and Publications International, as well as several children's books for Capstone Press. The duo has also co-authored two award-winning documentaries, *D-Day: A Crowning Glory* and *Vietnam: A Nation Remembers*. The D-Day documentary won a Telly Award, a Gold Aurora Award and a Crystal Communicator Award. The Vietnam documentary won a Telly, a Crystal Communicator Award and a Platinum Best of Show Aurora Award. The two authors, both with backgrounds in education, ask the questions: *How well do children understand the concept of freedom? Do holidays such as the Independence Day, Memorial Day, or Veterans Day have resonance for them, except as picnic opportunities or days off from school? And how do you talk to youngsters about the history of their country and the sacrifices made on behalf of freedom, without talking over their heads or boring them to tears?*

### **Series Form and Function**

Young people have difficulty relating to events or individuals that do not impact them directly, or that they cannot associate with people or situations in their own lives. The Embracing Freedom Series will tackle topics such as the meaning of Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, etc., the experiences of World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans, and the significance of the Pledge of Allegiance. It presents each of these topics in a comforting, "kid-centric" format that allows children to personalize historic and patriotic themes that can seem very distant and incomprehensible. For example, recall how you felt about our founding fathers during your school days... chances are you viewed them as a group of painfully proper old men in powdered wigs. In reality, of course, they were a diverse group of passionate rebels with a broad, and sometimes quirky, array of motivations! Children need relatable concepts and people in order to embrace and absorb history and its lessons. Research has shown that students learn best when new knowledge is built on prior knowledge and when learning is connected and relevant to their worlds (Mills 1991, Hickey, 1990).

The series will also address contemporary issues through terms and individuals that children identify with and care about. One story in the series is called "*My Mother Wears Combat Boots*" and deals with the fears and experiences of a young African American girl who lives with her grandmother while her mother is serving in Iraq. Another is "*My neighbor is a Caterpillar*", recently completed, which tells the story of a 12 year old boy who visits his neighbor, a World War II veteran, and hears about the elderly man's experiences during World War II. The first book in the series, "*Welcome Home Grandpa*," deals with a young girl's visit to a Veterans Day parade with her grandfather, and how she learns about her grandfather's service during the Vietnam War and the importance of honoring our veterans.

### ***Web Support***

Although the books will be presented in a “storybook” fashion they will all be non-fiction, as each story is based on real-life people or events, including those stories archived by the American Veterans Research Library. Once the series is in production, AVI will introduce an educational website that features an “Embracing Freedom” component for young people and teachers. This site will allow children to share their own stories and impressions and to submit pictures or ideas that might be incorporated into future books in the series. AVI is already working with young people to teach them how to record and preserve their family histories, especially those relating to family military service. This web site will be an extension of that initiative.

### ***Lesson Plans***

Each book in the series will be supplemented by lesson plans and activities that will be available to teachers and/or parents. Although most states mandate that teachers set aside a certain amount of time to educate their classes on civic themes or patriotic holidays such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day, many teachers either do not follow through at all or they present material that fails to entertain or energize the students. The Embracing Freedom Series will offer content and lesson plans that fulfill education standards in language arts and social studies, and its sub-domains of civics, geography, history, government, etc. The series will also have a leadership component to help young people understand the roles and responsibilities of leaders – and how they can effectively lead in their own lives. The authors are working with two educational consultants who will be reviewing both the books and the lesson plans to make sure they meet the appropriate academic criteria. The books will also be multi-cultural so as to appeal to a broad spectrum of individuals. Once the books are in production, AVI will be pursuing corporate support that will allow us to donate books and lesson plans to school districts across America at no charge.

### ***Series Style***

The overall flavor of the series offers a hint of Americana that adults will find particularly appealing, with a comfortable writing style reminiscent of the classic Little House books. The artwork by Lisa Edwards is also evocative of a simpler time that grown-ups will relate to and children will be charmed by. There will be approximately 15-20 illustrations per book, which will accompany about 20-30 pages of text, for a total of approximately 30-50 pages per book, depending on the reading level. The phrasing and flow of the text is simplified, but not simplistic. The idea is that parents or teachers should read the books to youngsters and share the experience with them.

While topics relative to preserving freedom can be complex or even intimidating, they are not presented as such in The Embracing Freedom Series. They are dealt with through the eyes of childhood and through individuals who are familiar and comfortable to children, such as grandparents, parents, brothers or sisters. The result is a series that manages to educate and entertain young people, even as it charms adults, who will appreciate the books’ thematic simplicity and the skill with which the authors address complicated contemporary topics while harkening back to the comfort

of a by-gone era. As we interviewed teachers and parents about the series, we were told:

- “there is nothing out there for younger students that effectively addresses Veterans Day, Memorial Day and related patriotic themes. This would be a great classroom tool.”
- “the idea of linking the books to lesson plans gives the teacher something to share with the students and then an interactive activity that will help them personalize what they have learned.”
- “what a wonderful story! Children will relate to the little girl, but adults will appreciate the storyline, the heart, and the message. Thank you.”
- “what a great way to introduce children to the cost of freedom, without exposing them to some of the harsher realities. The book is gentle yet powerful. I read it and cried, then my 14-year-old niece read it and cried.”

### ***Population Served***

All young people, ages 5-14 will be able to benefit from this program. Ohio and Indiana will be the initial testing and distribution points, but with appropriate funding, the books and lesson plans will be made available to schools across America. There will also be an emphasis on under-served students who are not routinely exposed to positive role models or the concepts of service and sacrifice for the betterment of society and future generations.

### ***Evaluation and Future Planning***

Teachers, parents and students themselves will play an active role in the evaluation and enhancement process. Teachers will have pre-project and post-project testing sheets for the students. They will also have Teacher Feedback Sheets. Likewise, take-home activities will feature parent Feedback Sheets. The web site itself will have a ratings page where teachers or parents can rate lesson plans, the effectiveness of the books, etc and where they can make suggestions for future content. Teachers will be able to upload lesson plans that can be partnered with specific books and themes.

### ***Books scheduled:***

*Welcome Home Grandpa* – Grades K-4 (Topic: Veterans Day & Vietnam) **(Book is complete)**

*My Neighbor is a Caterpillar* – Grade 4-6 (Topic: World War II and veterans in general) **(Book is complete)**

*My Mother Wears Combat Boots* – Grades K-4 (Topic: Women in the Military & War on Terror) **(Book is complete)**

*Day of Memories* – Grades 4-6 (Topic: Memorial Day & Korea)

*“I Pledge of Legions”* – Grades K-4 (Topic: The Pledge of Allegiance and the role of GIs) **(Manuscript is complete and awaiting illustration)**

*Poppa is a Citizen Soldier* – Grades K-4 (Topic: The National Guard and Reserves)

*A Sparkler for Allison* – Grades K-4 (Topic: Independence Day)

*The Fighting 99<sup>th</sup>* – Grades 4-6 (Topic: America’s first black combat pilots)

### ***Additional teaching tools***

The Book series is only one example of the multitude of tools we are developing in order to enhance the classroom experience, energize our in-house activities, and provide teachers with innovative materials and lessons that adhere to Academic Content Standards. By working with a variety of educational institutions, as well as with parents and children themselves, we are in the process of defining the most effective methods of teaching young people about the contributions of our veterans and the US Military. Woven throughout that compelling story will be lessons in history, civics, geography, language arts, and even science & technology.

We are also currently identifying topics for our “docu-mini” DVD series which will tell the stories of a variety of conflicts, services and individual GIs. AVI officials have previously prepared two such “docu-minis,” one of Vietnam and one on D-Day. Both features have won numerous national awards and have been presented in classrooms nationwide. The docu-minis developed for AVI and the NMHC will be designed to capture student interest, present unvarnished stories of conflict and courage, and provide exciting supplemental lessons and activities for classrooms and families, alike.

## **12). Target audience**

Initially the target audience is students in Ohio and Indiana, but the goal is to take the materials and programming nationwide, via a targeted distribution process and the availability of teaching tools and lesson plans through an educational web site. AVI is particularly interested in introducing the themes and content to disadvantaged youth who may not normally have access to the kind of leadership examples and positive role models exemplified by the diverse men and women and experiences spotlighted by our programming.

## **13). Collaboration**

As previously noted, AVI is collaborating on this project with numerous other entities, including The World War II Victory Museum / National Military History Center, Ohio Northern University, Webster University, Ohio University, Troy Schools, Oakwood Schools, Tipp City Schools and others. As we begin to develop and test the program as a whole, other individuals and organizations will be brought into the process as well.

## **14). Future plans and evaluation processes**

The goal is to create a self-sustaining program that will initially be available in two states, Ohio and Indiana, and ultimately the entire country. The American Veterans Institute is and will remain based in Ohio, but already our partnerships are much broader, geographically. Our current partnership with the National Military History Center is helping us to establish our national profile as well as providing a venue for events and additional support staff and resources. We are building joint websites and materials with the NMHC and are co-branding our intellectual property in order to better promote our similar missions and vision. We are also building a joint cyber museum – which we have dubbed “webseums,” which will offer inspiring stories, access to veteran

topics and materials, and numerous history-based activities, cyber displays and interactive edu-tainment functions.

Evaluation of the program's success will be on-going and will be achieved through interaction with young people, parents and educators at a variety of levels. The webseum site will offer the opportunity for parent/teacher feedback. It will also provide young people the opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions about future lesson plans or book topics and to weigh in on the experiences and stories from veterans in their own families.

Evaluation sheets are provided to teachers and schools each time a new lesson or project is introduced. The feedback from those evaluations will be used in refining the components of the education program. We are planning on establishing an Academic Advisory Board to evaluate our programming and recommend innovative new approaches. Our goal is to create programming that is user-friendly to all members of the target population: i.e. is easily explained by parents, easily taught by teachers, and easily understood by young people. Moreover, we seek to excite, inspire and motivate young people to want to know more about our men and women who serve, and how the lessons of that service – and the lessons of history – can be applied in their own lives.

#### **15). Expected outcomes**

The AVI education program is a stand-alone program of AVI but also supports the World War II Victory Museum and the National Military History Center. More important, it will create a youth connection to AVI's American Veterans Hall of Honor and American Veterans Research Library, which will be housed at the National Military History Center. However, there are specific goals for the first year of the project that will serve as the yardsticks for measuring success:

- Imparting on students, through cyber field trips, actual field trips, traveling outreach programs and lesson plans, a basic sense of who our veterans are, the form and function of our U.S. military, and the impact that military service has had on our culture and standard of living throughout America's 230+ year history.
- Demonstrating to students that learning about history – and learning in general -- can be fun, and can be applicable in their own lives.
- Giving students a sense of responsibility and accountability in their own lives; making them aware of the service and sacrifice of their own family members;
- Providing inspiration and leadership examples through stories of character, heroism, courage, self-sacrifice, and perseverance.
- Completion of the first phase of the "Embracing Freedom" book series (documented in depth in this proposal).
- Development of curriculum for grades K-12. To include handouts, worksheets, living history presentations, at-home activities, etc.
- Development of lesson plans to accompany the educational book series, and stand-alone lessons and activities that can be downloaded from the web site; tying all lesson plans to state and federal academic standards;

- Development of a dynamic educational web site for use by teachers, students and parents in the Miami County region and, ultimately, across America.
- Surveying teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and generate new ideas.
- Surveying students and parents to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and generate new ideas.
- Holding teacher orientations (three in Ohio; three in Indiana) to introduce the materials, the themes, and the most effective ways to convey them.

## 16). Conclusion

It is not enough to simply preserve history. Hiding yesterday's stories and heroes in a dusty vault does not make best use of the myriad of lessons and examples to be found within them. Human beings evolve by taking the lessons of yesterday and applying them to the challenges of tomorrow.

Our schools face the two-fold problem of a lack of time for adequate history education – and a lack of compelling materials. The American Veterans Institute believes that our teaching tools and lesson plans can and will pave the way for a renaissance of American history studies in the classroom.

We are dedicated to inspiring and motivating young people to recognize and embrace their own potential in a variety of ways:

- first, to give them an appreciation for learning and reading – and an understanding of how events and individuals from the past can influence the present and the future;
- second, to give them a sense of the responsibilities of leadership – to empower them with the belief that they can be leaders in their own lives;
- third, to instill in them a respect for the American military and an understanding of how the service and sacrifice of American GIs has shaped and defined our nation; and,
- finally, to help them understand the importance of concepts such as teamwork, cooperation, integrity, innovation, creativity and other qualities that are reflected in the lives and experiences of the veterans honored by the American Veterans Institute.

AVI seeks to not only preserve the past but also to influence and motivate the future. Through our education programming and our cooperative partnership with the World War II Victory Museum, the National Military History Center, Ohio University, Webster University and others, we can and will help redefine how our nation's schools teach American History and how young people understand and embrace the lessons of that history.