On Memorial Day most Americans will enjoy a well-deserved day off from the cares of work and school; they will relax at home and cherish the company of loved ones - But as we enjoy these comforts, we must pause to remember those, our invisible companions, who gave their lives to protect our nation. The manner in which a nation - a community - honors its fallen is a true reflection of its heart and soul. President Kennedy noted, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers.” As our fallen had their duty, we have ours – to honor and to remember. Today, we share a common sorrow, but we are united in our thanks and admiration for those who gave, as President Lincoln stated “their last full measure of devotion” to a cause much greater than themselves. Lincoln went on to say that it is the living who must complete the promise of the founding principles of our nation. Principles of liberty, freedom, justice and opportunity.

For many of us, Memorial Day is a day of conflicting emotions – The Veterans of Foreign Wars describes the emotions as a blend of pride and mournfulness, gratitude and loss, and a deep abiding sense of patriotism. This meaningful day was born of our shared need to understand, remember and honor those who have died so that we may live as free men and women. We are humbled by the tremendous courage and character shown by our brave servicemen and women throughout our history. As President Obama said in his 2016 Proclamation, “stepping into harm’s way to protect our nation and to safeguard the ideals that have long sustained our democracy.” Our community of hearts remembers that this day has deep significance for so many from each generation that mourn the loss of a loved one – more than 1.2 million men and women have perished as a result of military conflicts since the American Revolution. These fallen heroes are not just numbers, they are real people, with real families - These were individuals woven into the fabric of our communities. As Americans, we share the responsibility to preserve their memory.

From small towns to big cities, communities will pause to honor our fallen and their legacy of patriotism. They have taught us the value of sacrifice, hard work – and above all - a love of country. By giving their lives they have protected our nation, advanced the blessings of freedom, brought light to dark places, and laid the foundation for a more peaceful tomorrow – Brave men and women who did not
fight for glory or recognition, they fought because of their closely held belief in freedom – their belief in America.

Each of the service men and women buried across our country, those who were never found, as well as those who are rehabilitating from injuries - they all answered the call to serve and stepped forward to protect the nation they loved. In his 2003 Memorial Day Proclamation, President Bush reflected that “throughout our history, the decency, character and idealism of our military troops have turned enemies into allies and oppression into hope.” These men and women asked for little, yet they inspire so much - they inspire a commitment to the values and ideals on which this country was founded. As General George Patton observed at a Memorial Day service more than 60 years ago, “we come together to thank God that men and women like these lived, rather than regret that they died.” They died as heroes, but equally as important, they lived as heroes.

We understand that for many, this day brings a feeling of sadness for unfinished lives. There are faces of loved ones that will be forever young, their voices forever silent – all painful reminders. While service members and their families understand and accept the risks they take to serve our great nation, nothing can fully prepare a survivor for that knock at the door. Yet, we know that the completeness of a life is not measured only in length. It is measured in the deeds and commitments that give a life its purpose.

To those who were left behind – their hardships and their sacrifices – all who have faced life’s greatest heartbreak, our thoughts and prayers are with you - wives and husbands, children, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, friends and those who served alongside of these brave men and women. Their sacrifice for our great country must not go unnoticed. With compassion, we stand with those who grieve, and share in their great sorrow and great pride. We see that our fallen’s legacy shines bright in the people that they loved the most and that loved them – we can draw strength from their example - Through unimaginable loss, these families have tapped a courage and resolve that many of us will never know, President Obama shared in 2014.

As we honor America’s fallen, we also remember today’s heroes. Young men and women from our communities who are currently serving this great nation, engaged throughout the world – how proud we are of the men and women that serve today. Let us pray that they return home safely. Let us remember to offer support and comfort to their loving families.
We must also remember and support our veterans – the quiet, unassuming heroes living all around us who have committed themselves to a life of service to our nation and to our communities. Everyone’s life has been touched by a veteran – directly or indirectly. Find a way in your life – at home and work, at church or a neighborhood gathering, wherever – to keep their memories alive. Honor their sacrifices, listen to their stories, and cherish their memories. Make an effort to get to know the veteran who lives next door, or who you attend church with, or with whom you serve a civic organization. Learn about their military histories and service. Let us all honor those who have died by providing greater assistance to our veterans. They deserve a country committed to serving them, just as they have served our country. There are many ways to keep our fallen, as well as our injured and ill veterans in your heart and mind throughout the year. If you are so inclined, there are many organizations that offer countless ways to give back to those who have endured the physical, psychological and emotional wounds of war.

“We will never be able to precisely measure what was gained by the sacrifices we are honoring, so today we acknowledge a debt that is beyond our power to repay” stated President Bush. Memorial Day, this solemn day of remembrance, serves as a call to duty – a call to live our lives in such a way that we honor those who gave their lives for our country and the freedoms we enjoy. If we uphold the values for which they fought so valiantly, then they will have not have died in vain. We must prove ourselves worthy of our service men and women’s great sacrifices by rededicating ourselves to the principles that they fought for and many died for. We owe each of them the highest regard and the assurance that their commitment to this nation’s freedom will not be forgotten.

Our responsibility to those we honor today is to pass on to future generations the values and ideals that founded our nation and they defended. Author William Harvard stated – “The greatest glory of a freeborn people is to transmit that freedom to their children.” Our obligation and our opportunity are one and the same – our obligation is to give voice to the fallen, honor them and share their stories of sacrifice and heroism – our opportunity is to use this day to inspire a new generations understanding of their freedoms and the sacrifices made for them.

As a tribute to our fallen’s sacrifice, we reflect on the past, renew our commitment to remembering, and to deepening the traditions of this special day for future generations – all to build a future worthy of their sacrifices. Today and every day, with solemn gratitude, deep respect and unwavering pride – we remember these proud patriots - we pray for them - we honor them. Let us never forget how
bravely, faithfully and selflessly these men and women have served – for it is their immense, collective sacrifices that keep our country safe and free.

Today, let us be reminded of President Kennedy’s call to action, he said “As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

May our Memorial Day be reflective of those we honor.

Respectfully,
Mayor Pam Bobst