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**POW/MIA Recognition Day declared**

On Friday, September 21, Governor Mark Dayton and the Minnesota House of Representatives declared that day as POW/MIA (Prisoners of War/Missing in Action) Recognition Day in the State of Minnesota.

Before this day, 48 of the 50 states had adopted this proclamation. Minnesota and California were the only two that had not. Traci Juntunen of Kroschel and Associates (Farmers Insurance) thought there was something wrong with this. She called the National League of POW/MIA Families and asked what to do.

Along with Jim Best of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Hinckley American Legion member Al Wolter and many others, Juntunen worked hard, made phone calls to the area legislators and succeeded at her self-assigned task.

A banquet held at Tobies on Friday, September 21 and hosted by Kroschel and Associates honored those still missing in action and those still unaccounted for.

When walking into the room, the first thing you noticed was The Missing Man Table. It was set with six chairs, representing those either captured or are still unaccounted for from each branch of the military and one set aside for the civilians. In Minnesota there are still 33 unaccounted for veterans from just the Vietnam War. A representative from each branch of the military tipped a chair reserving that spot for those missing. Representing the Air Force was Al Wolter. The Marines were represented by Ron Stauffer. For the Navy it was Mike Milano. Representing the Army was Carl Jerdin. For the Coast Guard it was active duty member Patrick Drayer. Finally, representing the civilians still missing was Navy Veteran and current Border Patrol Agent, Patrick Maroney.

The Missing Man Table is set to represent specific things:

The table is round to represent everlasting concern on the part of the survivors for their missing loved ones.

The tablecloth is white, symbolic of the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms.

A single red rose in the vase signifies the blood that many have shed in sacrifice to ensure the freedom of our beloved United States of America. This rose also reminds us of the family and friends of our missing comrades who keep the faith, while awaiting their return.

The red or yellow ribbon symbolizes continued uncertainty, hope for their return and determination to account for them.

A slice of lemon on the bread plate represents the bitter fate of the missing.

A pinch of salt symbolizes the countless fallen tears of families as they wait.

An inverted glass represents the fact that the missing and fallen cannot partake.

The Bible represents the spiritual strength and faith to sustain those lost from our country.

A lit candle reflects the hope for their return.

The empty chairs are a reminder of the missing and fallen who aren't present.

Lt. Colonel, and 18-year military veteran, Sue Behrens, was the featured speaker. Behrens is currently a member of the 133rd Airlift wing out of St. Paul and is the commander of the 109th Air Medical Evacuation Squadron.

“Let’s not forget the POWs and MIAs. When we say those words or that acronym, most people think of Vietnam,” said Behrens. “But the truth is there have been POWs and MIAs in every war and every conflict.”

She mentioned books written by former POWs, and how it was “in a sense, good.” Behrens said, “It reminds us of the sacrifices these individuals made, the time they gave up and will never get back, and of the tenacity to endure those everyday hardships and torture.”

On Friday, Representative Jason Rarick read the proclamation signed by Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt and Rarick declaring September 21, 2018 as POW/MIA Recognition Day.

“We hear the call to ‘always remember’ or ‘never forget,’” said Rarick. “We just commemorated the anniversary of 9/11, still fresh in our memories, even though it was 17 years ago. But how many people will go past December 7 not remembering what that day stands for?”

POW/MIAs don’t get the recognition they deserve, said Rarick. He continued by reading a resolution from the Minnesota House of Representatives, signed by Speaker of the House Kurt Daudt and himself declaring September 21, 2018, as POW/MIA Recognition Day.